

The View from the Park

Larkhall Park Newsletter

April 2024

Now we are well and truly into Spring, April is perhaps the most exciting month of the year.

The park suddenly begins to look green and vibrant and the warmer days and lighter evenings help to gladden the heart of all park users. Now is the time to start mowing the grass regularly for the grass team, a sign that Summer is on it's way.

Colour and interest come not only from bright flowers but also from the unfolding foliage on trees and shrubs, as the plants fully wake from their Winter rest. Scented plants are an absolute must in the park at any time of the year but particularly so in springtime and are best grown close to entrances to the park to get the maximum benefit of the fragrance they produce. This is why I have been attempting to focus as much as possible on and enhance, those areas with my ideas and my efforts. We surely want entrances that greet visitors to the park and make them feel welcome.

My ideas however, need to be supported, in order for them to become reality.

On this point, perhaps you have noticed that as we enter Spring the first flowers you see will usually be creams, whites, and yellows ? (snowdrops, cherries, narcissus, golden tassels of catkins on Hazels and *Garrya eliptica*) Then as we proceed further it is blues, violets and purples (Crocus, vinca, bluebells, campanella) that make an appearance, and coming later pinks and reds (camellias, ribes and roses). This is not a fluke but rather because over time nature has worked it's magic and the flowers and bugs have evolved together. The first bugs that wake up from their Winter slumber are only able to identify light colours (flies etc) but once the blues come into season the bees start to wake up and begin pollinating and so it goes on.

Quite logically, as per 'Natural Selection' and all that, nature has evolved for them to work closely together and they continue to do so over the Seasons right throughout the year.

It is surely a good idea to build up a wide diversity of plants - as much as is practicable - in the park, especially those that will encourage wildlife, specifically insects. Leaving the odd corner here and there sown with wildflower seeds and leaving some clumps of logs at various locations around the park where beneficial creatures such as hedgehogs and toads can take shelter must be good practice to encourage balance in the park. It doesn't all have to be formally structured.

I very much support the Lambeth policy of 'no pesticides' but it can make keeping on top of pest issues much more complicated and labour intensive when excess labour is something I just do not have. Hence I am sure everyone can agree that receiving some assistance from our natural allies has just got to be a good idea ?

Weeding in the park has already become a mammoth task which I simply cannot manage on my own. Thank goodness for the strimmer !

Strimming followed by a good layer of mulch can work wonders at the entrances whilst enriching the soil as we move through the seasons.

This is the time to remove frost-damaged shoots from shrubs like *Choisya* (Mexican Orange Blossom) Stems should be cut back to a healthy leaf lower down the shoot, or to a stem junction. Time to prune and train clematis and roses onto wires. Training the shoots of roses as near horizontal as possible restricts the flow of sap, this causes more side-shoots to develop along the whole length of the main stems and therefore more flowers are produced. If the main stems are left to grow vertically all the flowers are produced only at the tips of the stems.

I tend to do a bit of pruning and trimming wherever I find myself working in the park, a task often likened to 'painting the Forth Bridge' in Scotland, a never ending task !
But I love it, I feel lucky to be working in the park, I really do.

Now is a good time for planting plants of all sorts and although the time for 'bare-root' stock planting has passed, all plants are now available sold as container-grown specimens. Pruning 'after flowering' on flowering shrubs is the rule, getting the shrub ready for lowering next Spring. When the flowers have gone over, cut back the flowered shoots to two or three buds from their base. On more established shrubs cut out about a third of the older growth to the base of the plant. This will encourage new growth to grow from the base.

For the Community Gardeners this is a time to plant outdoors: asparagus crowns, carrots, main crop potatoes, lettuce, radish, beetroot, peas, broad beans and salad onions. By sowing little and often you can avoid having a glut of produce arriving all at once.

Also: Onions, dwarf French beans, leeks, Kholirabi and Winter brassicas (broccoli, cabbages, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts), planting tomatoes in bags, can begin in earnest just now but do remember to water regularly in dry weather.

Litter

The litter problem has varied a bit so far this year, but as always it is typically closely tied to drinking in the park. Please put your cans and bottles in the bins provided. When litter is just thrown on the floor it means that I, the Part-Time Park Gardener, spend many hours each week litter-picking areas of the park when I could/ should be gardening.

What have I been doing ?

Pruning, trimming, weeding, and mulching.

I am sure I speak for everyone when I say it is very good to see the new Adventure Play area up and running. Let us hope the Park Toilet is a reality sooner rather than later, and the Park Cafe ? People are always asking me about both.

Volunteers

A huge thank you to J and latterly Sally and Dave for their help in getting the areas near the Surprise pub in better shape. Now that the Petanque Court has largely been weeded I am sure they will help keep it in good order. Also, I tried out the Weed Burner funded by The Friends of Larkhall Park there, and I believe this will prove useful for keeping on top of the smaller stubby weeds that tend to bubble up in such areas. Volunteers are always needed for such tasks as weeding - good physical exercise in the fresh air - providing invaluable help around the park. If anyone is interested we can swop telephone numbers and when you can spare an hour or two just let me know, there are always things to do. A special thanks to KB for some of the information above relating to flower colours and insects. Very interesting !

What I want to do, could be doing ?

Well, finish clearing and mulching at the park entrances.

Implementing a Herb Garden in the children's area (East) with a Garrya elliptica etc., as per my 'Ideas Sheet' circulated last Summer ?

Putting a splash of red roses in the border next to the ex-pub at the Priory Grove entrance where we could also do with a short edging rail in specific locations to emphasise where the path stops and the borders begin. Perhaps with a few signs requesting 'Please stay off the Borders' ?

Again as per my 'Ideas Sheet'.

Remember, the park is there for all of us, so please let us take a pride in our park !

Very best wishes and thank you to everyone involved !

Colin

The Larkhall Park Gardener