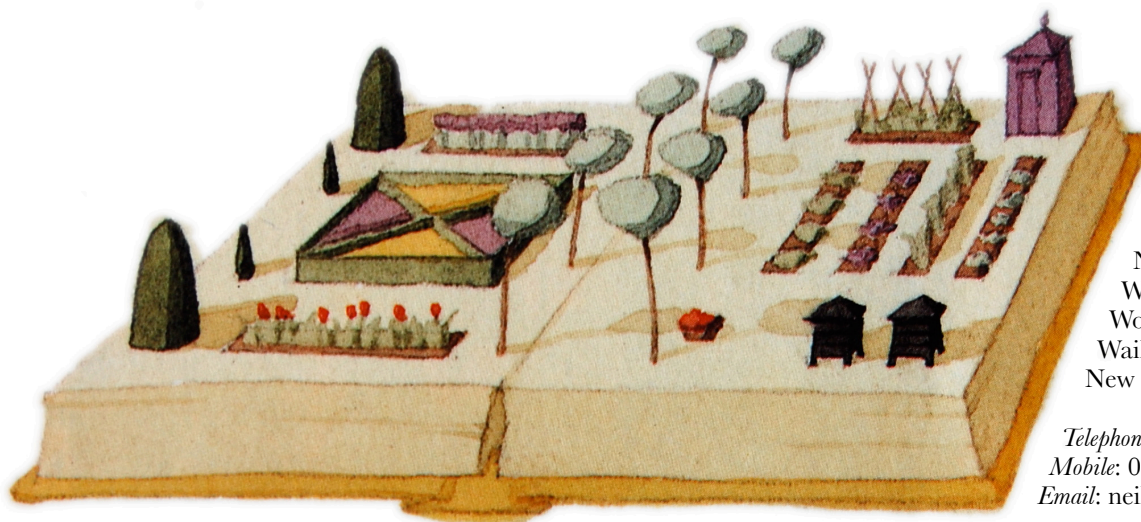


NOTES *from the* GARDEN



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IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH

**At Christmas I no more desire a rose than wish snow in May's new-fangled mirth,
However like of each thing that in season grows**

William Shakespeare Love's Labour's Lost

On a day recently I discovered a truth. Someone who'd never been to the garden before was coming to visit, so I went to look at the garden with the eyes of a stranger. What an unkempt shambles! Roses curtsying to the ground, feral violets washing about the walls of the Bothy, self sown plants taking over the paths and lawns uncut, all the result of weeks of rain and my lack of arousal. Well, too late, there was noting I could do about it and either way I couldn't loose: if the visitor were a gardener then they would see beyond the chaos, or else, being ignorant, they would think that this was how the garden should look at this time.

This was when I discovered the folly of preconceptions. We had it all wrong - we approached gardens with a pre-set bias - only the week before, this had been proved most succinctly when I visited two gardens, because, yes they reflected the season. Flowers in these gardens had trespassed beyond boundaries, what was left of the roses had blobs of brown pate in place of buds, moss smothered pots with pelts of chlorophyll and other rangy plants had annexed clumps of others. The gardener had lost control, Flora had lost her head and NONE OF IT MATTERED. The gardens resonated, among a surplus of vegetation, with their own intrinsic beauty. And why not? It's us who are misled. We garden with an obsession for control. Here before my eyes, were examples of top class gardeners allowing nature to reflect the season. It was lovely. The friend with whom I had visited these places felt as I did: we were witnessing how nature can make mugs of us all. As if to prove the argument, the week before I'd visited a garden where control has effectively destroyed every natural impulse, leaving the

place sterile. The garden-immaculate and flawless - might have been prepared for a magazine photo -shoot, where every vestige of evidence of the season was expunged in homage to the great God Control. The garden didn't sing - yet it is admired by many as exemplary. I have met many people from both home and abroad who are critical of the first type of gardens for reflecting the current season's obstreperous greenery, disappointed, expecting such gardens to conform to their own horticultural template. Pity. If this year there is another drought and they visit certain gardens where poppies have gone walk-about on sallow baked earth, I hope they will stop, reflect, turn back and take another look.

My final point of reflection this month: Do you remember how once in this country we could anticipate the rhythm of our seasons by the arrival in the shops of the first rhubarb or strawberries? Now everything is always. no taste sensation to look forward to, only blandness. Surely a good reason to grow your own.

THE KITCHEN GARDEN

A much neglected garden this month, with many more pressing priorities, which will be revealed over the coming pages. However for all that, some things have been achieved, such as getting the garlic into the ground before the shortest day. First time ever. On this mornings perambulations around the garden on water skis, the first shoots were appearing above ground.

The broad beans are growing strongly and now need tying in to keep them from sprawling all over the paths and the cabbages are recovering from the predations of the resident blackbird hooligans who delight in removing the plants from the comforting embrace of Mother Earth. At least they do lay them neatly on the ground beside their allotted position, so they can be replaced without disturbing the straight lines, so beloved by Ned.

On a recent visit to the mainland, Ned and the old man had great delight in being able to deliver a goodly carton of freshly harvested rhubarb stems to our city cousins. It does the heart good to be able to share the bounty of the garden with others.

The recent spell of wintery weather has prevented much work being done in the kitchen garden when time was available, it is just not worth trying to work soggy cold soil for considerable damage can be done to the fragile soil structure working in such conditions.

An interesting point to ponder: a bed was planted earlier with Ilam Hardy potatoes, of which only three plants survived the depredations of the pukekoes and other varmints. Another crop was sown along with a bed of Jersey Benes for the christmas table. The two later crops were sown with each tuber being wrapped in a comfrey leaf. Now the second sowing is strong and lushly healthy, whereas the surviving three plants have succumbed to whatever plague that beset them.

THE PICKERY

Another neglected area, allowed to get on with growing without the interference of Ned and the old man. The Iceland poppies, stock, carnations and pinks providing fillers for the vases. One disappointment is the poor germination rate of the *Ranunculus* packaged by a well known firm of seedsmen from our local garden centre. Out of the original thirty corms purchased only twenty germinated, the next packet of ten only three appeared. A most disappointing result. All corms were planted in individual pots under exactly the same conditions in the greenhouse, so one can only surmise that the corms themselves were not viable. A percentage of non appearance too high to be acceptable.

THE GREENHOUSE AND COLD FRAME YARD

Both these areas are a little crowded at this time, with ordered plants arriving just about everyday. Our tree planting program has been put on hold because of the weather, holes filling up with water the moment they are dug, so the holding stand is a little overcrowded. The cold frames are full, with a long waiting list, almost rivaling the local Councils list for pensioner housing.

The old man's first order from Parva Plants in Christchurch arrived this week along with the first of the roses from Tasman Bay Nurseries in Blenheim. This was the rose 'Sally Holmes' ordered last year but not in stock. A further order for roses for the main house rose beds was placed this week.

A recent visit to Roger Hunter at Mangere, always an event looked forward to by Ned and the old man, if not for the plants then for the pure entertainment value in such a visit. Box plants, cheaper than anywhere else have swelled the stock in the cold frame yard. These will be potted on and then cuttings taken to increase the supply of plants ready for planting out as edging in the new formal gardens.

Ned has been busy sowing seeds in the greenhouse, one particular tray is causing much interest, this is of Broccoli Raab (also known as Spring Rapini). We have two eight year olds visiting over Christmas and New Year from North America. One of these youngsters has expressed interest in eating this variety of broccoli, having seen it in the shops in his home city. Seeds were sourced from the excellent Kings Seeds in Kati Kati, then sown in a special tray. They appeared and were duly photographed at this stage and the photo sent to this young man, each stage will be recorded and forwarded to allow him to feel part of the process, so when he arrives and is served the results at his Christmas dinner his involvement will be complete. Hopefully a future gardener in the making.

Talking of gardeners in the making, Ned the old man's right hand, had very little gardening experience when he arrived here, and had never really had a garden of his own. Ned absorbs knowledge like a blotter, thirsting for more information constantly and is developing into a natural plantsman. The old man is justly proud of his protegee, but is finding that he has to

swat up each day to keep up with this seeking of knowledge, so in many ways it is a win win situation for both men.

We are experimenting this year with Sea Kale. Seed has been sown into pots and will be planted out in the kitchen garden when ready. Sea Kale is usually forced under forcing pots and the tender young shoots only eaten, then the pots are removed to allow the plants to develop naturally until dying down at the end of the season, then the cycle starts all over.

The two gardeners will be experimenting with many unusual varieties of vegetables this year to add interest and variety to the table.

THE PLEASURE GARDENS

The focus of all attention this month by our two intrepid followers of the number eight fencing wire ethos. The gauntlet had been thrown down and the challenge accepted a tree house was required for the entertainment of our young visitors, so a tree house they would have.

Construction continues apace and the first is nearing completion. Yes, the first, not to be outdone it was decided that two are better than one. Much hilarity, scratching of heads, problem solving and acquiring of new skills. A new sense of pride pervades the garden, “We can do anything” (at least we will give it a go).

Photos of the construction will be published, but not yet, because it is a surprise for our young visitors and it would spoil the excitement for the two builders if they discovered by accident what the two rogues were up to.

Other projects in the planning stage are a path to the beach, easy, new formal gardens, slightly less easy, and a “boat port”, slightly harder, but Oh how it does the heart good to have purpose and the stretching of ones imagination and abilities. It makes you feel stronger and more alive and the minor irritations of life are put to one side, where they belong.

As said before, our tree planting program has come to a stand still, mainly because of the weather but also because of other events, but this is good because a pause has given us time to reflect and to tweak our original plans. This is always a good thing, because sometimes with ones head constantly staring downwards, you forget where you are heading and new ideas are not given the light to develop and flower.

THE BOG GARDEN



Talking of flowering, this is where Ned's long hidden talents are emerging and developing. The photo on the left shows the area around the middle pond before the old trees were removed. This was definitely a 'no go' space. Overgrown, turgid and mosquito ridden. Late last year the trees were removed and fill moved from the storage area and there it stayed, unloved and ignored, put into the 'too hard basket' by the old man.

Enter Ned and the challenge issued and accepted with alacrity. Poor man, he had no idea at this stage what was awaiting him under all the rubbish etc that lurked in this hidden and forgotten space. The old man in his rather devious way had given Ned books on the 'Lost Gardens of Heligan' to read prior to the issuing of the challenge. Ned forever the romantic saw this as his chance to relive the



pages of the books which had captured his imagination (as intended by the wily old fool) The second photo shows the initial work done by Ned to 'civilize' and bring the area under control. It looks easy, but there was much blood sweat and almost tears to get to this stage.



The next photo shows the first planting, rock edges giving definition and ease of mowing and maintenance. The tree trunk seen in the left hand corner will have the rose "Kiftsgate" embracing the dead trunk and will hopefully provide colour and an interesting background to this garden and provide interest and colour when viewed from the verandas of the main house. A collection of interest plants is being built up to provide colour, texture and interest and make it a

destination of interest when walking the garden,

THE RECIPE

Homity Pie

Homity pie is a simple and delicious dish which has endless variations, but is the potatoes that make it. When choosing a potato for this dish make sure you choose a good waxy variety.

Short crust pastry	675 g potatoes, unpeeled
2 medium onions	a few drops olive oil
4 garlic cloves	175g mature cheddar cheese, grated
4 tablespoons chopped flat leaf parsley	sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Line a 20 cm flan tin with the pastry and bake blind for 5 minutes. Cover the potatoes with cold water, bring to the boil and simmer for 10-15 minutes until just cooked, then drain and set aside. Meanwhile roughly chop the onions, crush the garlic and sweat off gently in the olive oil until translucent. If you are not a vegetarian you could add 225g chopped bacon to the onion here. Next slice the potatoes into 2 cm thick slices into a large bowl and mix in the onions, parsley, half of the cheese and season well. Loosely put into the pastry case, top with the remaining cheese and cook for 20-25 minutes at 375°F, 190°C, Gas mark 5.
 2. Enjoy
- Very tasty either hot or cold. Serves 4-6

RANDOM THOUGHTS

The first of July marks the first anniversary of the takeover of the estate by the new owners. What a year, it's been like riding the most thrilling roller coaster ride, many changes, all for the good, new gardens, new ideas - what fun. Tribute must be paid to them for taking on the old man and for allowing him to continue building his dream garden and for the courage to allow him to blend ideas both old and new with their own.

Also it is time to say a big thank you to Ned, the best work mate and working companion any man was ever blessed with, and last but by no means least to May-Belle our very able housekeeper, thank you for your continuous supply of good food, kind words and encouragement, without you two the estate would be a lesser place.

We all look forward to the coming year with pride and excitement.