

GET GARDENING

Some of you may have heard me on the radio last autumn, when I was co-hosting a 3-hour discussion show on Radio Oxford. During this programme, whilst discussing a huge range of subjects (but very little about gardening it must be said), I was given the title of 'The Opinionated Snooty Gardener', all in good fun of course, I think...!



Well, I prefer to look upon myself as 'The Instinctive Gardener'. Which is reinforced by my answer to another question that I reader has put to me. The question was "When you are presented with a plant that you know little about or have never worked with before, how do you know how to prune it?". My answer is to use some reference books but mainly to go by instinct. Instinct is something not to reason with, to try to understand, nor question. Your instinct is never wrong in my opinion, just go with it even if it doesn't make any sense initially.

However long we choose to ignore all those pruning jobs, in the end they still have to be undertaken, so be brave and bite the bullet and get on with it. Because eventually, the pruning jobs will accumulate and will result in a huge and daunting effort to sort things out when everything is overgrown.

Gardeners neglect of pruning is not so much through dislike or boredom – as with weeding, for example – but more to do with the fear of the unknown. Pruning is often perceived as one of the black arts of gardening, a skill that some possess, while others do not.

Of course, as with most gardening matters, it's simply a matter of experience. I think more rubbish is spoken about the subject of gardening, than many other subjects I can think of. It all comes down to experience, and there is no right way or wrong way to garden. If it works for you, stick with it.

Sitting reading and thinking about the pruning job in hand will not improve your technique, but getting out there and doing it will. We all make mistakes at first, but nature is very forgiving and it is not often you will kill a plant by making pruning mistakes. Especially when you consider that most gardeners err on the side of caution when they begin.

Above all, it is most important to have a go and see how your garden reacts and improves, you just need to find the confidence to make the first step to picking up the secateurs and making a start.

There is no magic art, plants have been grown for thousands of years in gardens, and people have been pruning them during the same period without causing the mass demise of our favourite plants.

Like many gardening jobs, pruning comes down to common sense and logic, which we all discover with experience. Most of us only have a few different types of plants in our gardens that need pruning, so just focus on knowing how to prune those, as understanding how to prune plants that you don't own is irrelevant.

In the wild, Mother Nature doesn't prune. Animals browse on plants, lightly trimming them randomly. Branches die and fall off, and the wind sometimes blows trees down. But Mother Nature always survives.

So why prune at all if in the wild plants don't worry if they are properly pruned or not, I hear you all murmuring.

There are several good reasons why we should prune, especially if you remember that we are growing plants in artificial conditions and that we want them to perform at their very best. Of course, you need not prune them at all if you don't want to. Many gardeners do not prune, but you just won't get the best out of your plants like that. Having said that, there are many trees and shrubs that do not need regular pruning. One attraction of some conifers is they do

not need any attention at all.

However, there is no doubt that if you do prune, your plants will look much better for it. They will be shapely and productive, and will not have any dead or damage wood to spoil their beauty.

Go on, get out in the garden and give pruning a go and begin to build up your experience. Keeping in mind that gardening is learnt and not taught.

Happy gardening.

STUART MABBUTT



MARCHAM/FRILFORD DIG NEWS 2007

This July will be the seventh season for the dig in Trendles field, next to the former Noah's Ark pub – just off the A338 before it crosses the Ock on the road to Wantage. Lots of you will have visited the site where the University of Oxford is digging a fascinating Romano-British site. You can read about what has happened in previous years in the Coral Rag – on sale at Marcham P.O. and Cumbers Farm Shop.

This year as before the public are welcome to visit (archaeologists are at work every day except Saturdays for the 4 weeks from Sunday 2nd July) – but the best day to visit will be **NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY DAY - SUNDAY 22nd JULY** when there will be guided tours and other attractions. Many schools, societies and groups arrange to make separate day time or evening visits.

In 2005 and 2006 we were able to offer local amateurs the chance to get involved thanks to an award from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Vale and Ridgeway Trust was awarded a Local Heritage Initiative grant for 'The Trendles Project: Exploring Marcham's Past', to help us investigate and promote the heritage of the Trendles site. We ran a 'People's Trench' to give hands-on archaeological training and experience to local people; those who do not want to dig all day can sit down and 'pot wash' (wash finds).

The Trust has decided to fund the 'People's Trench' again in 2007 - six days a week (Saturday is a rest day) - from Sunday 1st to Friday 27th July. Lots of previous volunteers want to come back but we would welcome more: you will receive some basic training and be fully supervised at no cost to yourself! We need a minimum commitment of 2 days, but these days do not need to be consecutive. Please note that anyone under 16 must be accompanied. Pot washing is on offer on the following dates: 5th, 11th, 12th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 24th July.

For further information please contact Janey Cumber on 01865-391327/391840 or by email janey.cumber@tiscali.co.uk. If you have already put your name down I will be in touch with you during June.

JANEY CUMBER

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