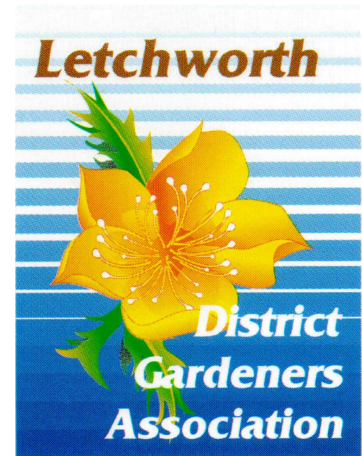


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Gleanings from the

# Compost Heap



Summer 2010

## Wildlife in the garden

One of the joys of gardening is sharing your green space with a variety of wildlife. At the time of writing (early May) we have identified the following birds nesting in the garden: at least two blackbirds, at least two collared doves and one great tit – which, after much indecision, decided the ideal nestbox was one with a metal opening only suitable for a blue tit – a considerably smaller bird. After several mornings watching the bird attempting to get into the box from the back, bottom and above and finally attacking the metal in the hope of expanding it, we changed the box front with another great tit-sized opening, before we ended up with a bird with an extremely bent beak. The nestbox is now happily occupied; by the time you read this, the parents should be scouring the garden for insects to feed to hungry baby birds.

To our amazement, we have also had a duck nesting under the juniper near our pond. We had seen the duck and drake mallard swimming on the pond and investigating the shrubs. The duck disappeared under the juniper, stood on top and generally surveyed thoroughly, but after each occasion they flew off. Then, one morning, we discovered the duck, deep in the greenery, determinedly sitting on eggs. Finally ten delightfully fluffy ducklings hatched, tumbled into the pond and bobbed happily after their mother.

### Taking ducks to water

We consulted the local birding group on what to do about them as they would need to get to a much larger area of water and the river is half a mile away. Word was that we caught the ducklings (!) put them in a box/bucket and duck

would follow us. The distance apparently was not a problem for duck feet, as they have been known to walk much further. However, we were saved the interesting experience of attempting to catch ten small ducklings and their worried mother - as they disappeared in the course of a morning. If anyone has seen a duck with ten ducklings on a nearby river or pond, please let us know they're safe.

We also have blue tits nesting - in our sparrow box- and goldfinches somewhere in some shrubby bushes. There are dunnock nests in the mock orange behind the compost bins and wood pigeons in next door's pyracantha, which I include as it overhangs our fence. There is a robin nest in the ivy at the front of the house and a thrush somewhere nearby as it is loudly claiming its territory each morning and evening. It's good to know a new generation of cheerful songbirds are underway to provide constant entertainment through the year.

### Keep on feeding

One of the reasons for the plethora of birds is that we provide water and keep feeding throughout the year. This used to be regarded as dangerous, but the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds did some research and discovered that as long as you have peanuts in metal containers, so the birds can only scrape off small pieces and not choke baby birds with whole nuts, this is a benefit and builds up the health of parent birds, while they're busy finding squashy bugs for feeding babies. Other good points of metal containers are that they last much longer and are squirrel-proof. Our visiting squirrels do manage to extract some nuts and have taken off quite a lot of paint, but the

containers, though slightly dented, are still working well.

We regularly put out peanuts, sunflower seeds and recently have taken to providing buggy nibbles, specially made for insect-loving birds. These were intended for our robins, but - despite the nibbles being in a container with an overlapping plastic hood - our starlings have carefully worked out how to squeeze in and can demolish large amounts of these gourmet goodies in seconds. Very annoying, though the robins do manage to get their share.

### **Beware lily beetles!**

The advantage, of course, is that all these nesting birds will be feeding insects to baby birds, so aphids, beetles, and many other damaging creatures are kept in check. Unfortunately, but understandably, the birds do not eat lily beetles. These infuriating newcomers to the UK are my most hated pest. Their eggs smell and look disgusting - black and oily - and the larvae ruin leaves and flower buds of lilies and fritillaries. Look out for these bright red, very attractive-looking beetles all through the summer and squash on sight. Make sure you check (carefully) underneath leaves, which is where the egg/larvae tend to hide. The easiest way to deal with them is to remove the entire leaf and then squash that, complete with attachments. Sadly, the first knowledge you may have of an infestation is when all the leaves on your lilies turn brown and fall off. Obviously then the bulb can't pick up any sustenance, so not only have you lost this year's flowers but the future ones as well.

Now that the weather has improved and our gardens are starting to flourish, it is time for my regular plea. PLEASE do not use slug pellets or chemical sprays in your garden. There are wildlife-friendly options available if you are not prepared to rely on your birds, hedgehogs and toads. Just think: do you really want to spend time in a garden that has been sprayed with poisons; particularly do you want your children and pets getting these on hands, paws or in their mouths? It is worth losing a few plants to have a safe garden for wildlife and for people!

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

#### **June 17th: Visit to a wormery.**

Wormeries can be the fastest and most efficient way of converting waste kitchen and garden materials into wonderful, crumbly brown

compost. This visit should show you how simple the process is.

**NOTE: numbers are limited so call for details.**

### **July 3rd SUMMER SHOW and PLANT SWAP**

The Show will be held at St George's Hall, Common View. Full details of the Show, section judges, the various sections and instructions on how to organise your exhibits are in the Members' Handbook.

**Please note that the deadline for entry forms for participation in the Summer Show is 10 pm on Thursday, 1st July.** See page one of the Members' Handbook.

Also if you have spare plants, bring them along to swap for something new. If you don't have any spares, there will be interesting plants for sale also.

### **July 31st Visit to Thompson and Morgan Trial Grounds.**

If you have ever seen the wonderful photographs of plants in the T & M catalogues, you have to go to the place where these are taken. It is fascinating to see how different plants can behave so differently when grown in exactly the same way, in the same soil. Really shows you how good some varieties are!

### **End Notes**

\* **LDGA History:** we would like to chronicle the names of people who have been part of the LDGA's history. If you have names or memories of people or events, send these in to our Chair by email or phone for a postal address. We are also looking for someone prepared to collate these memories, visit people and take notes etc.

\* **Ideas for monthly meetings:** if you have ideas of speakers or topics for next year's presentations, send these in as soon as possible, so we can try to include them.

\* **Email alert:** if you have recently changed your email address or are not sure if we have it, please send this in to our Membership Secretary so we can ensure you get information as quickly as possible.

### **Contact details:**

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