

Confession time, or ‘things we don’t talk about’ *Joan Ilett*

Having welcomed the local CGS group three times to our garden, been on a number of outings and enjoyed chatting to fellow garden lovers, I feel it is time I came clean about a secret liking - not a passion you understand, but an appreciative admiration for that much maligned, ill understood marvel of mobile home design, dare I even whisper it? ... the silent, stingless snail!

I’m definitely not one of those perfectly tidy garden angels, and before you start thinking I need committing somewhere (if not to a saline trap with my creepy friends) I might remind you that one ex-Mayor of London loves newts! Of course, interest in snails isn’t quite so upperclass as that of newts, but as my old Dad would say similarly of flowers ‘You can’t eat ‘em, girl’, whereas there is a thriving escargot industry.

If you can just overcome what some would say is a natural repugnance and admire the individual beauty, colour, shape of their shells, you would have to admit they are a colourist’s delight - delicate shades of white, pinkish fawn, grey, black, brown, yellow, in infinite variety and pattern formation, and never two exactly alike. Stop, for a moment, and look at their structure; neat, compact, eyes capable of wobbling around in all directions, and with perfect vision - did you ever see a snail in spectacles? Their alarm system is so sensitive they can retreat and shutdown the hatches at the speed of light! How can anyone not appreciate the independent capabilities of even the tiniest snail, making its solitary way, one bedroomed starter home aloft, seeking to acquire its earlybird breakfast on a dawn slither? I know they can be destructive, decimating almost all the foliage and flowers they



may come across, but at least they're quiet about it, unlike the starlings who regularly stripped our conference pear tree.

What a hopeless apology for a gardener, some of you are thinking, a disgrace to the Society, strip her of her wellies, garden raincoat and contents of her pockets at once! So to show I do understand points of view opposed to mine, which, of course, are mainstream and general, I quote below from an article sent me by one of our daughters living in Glasgow which appeared in the Sunday Herald back in June 1999:

'Shell attack ... What to do about it? You could follow the advice of Britain's favourite gin drinker, put out half finished half grapefruits ... and collect them, full of slugs and snails in the morning ... Or that of a noted malt whisky imbibor, the late Amis Senior who advised: 'half fill a bowl with 'second class' beer, the slugs drink, fall in and die a happy death,' ... Or that of his ex wife Elizabeth Jane Howard, apparently either a horsewoman or an upholsterer, who would wind horse hair 'coarsely twisted' round her plants. ... These nostrums, along with others from 'the great and the good and the gardeners', were contributed to Lady Wardington's Superhints for Gardeners (Michael Joseph, £9.99) which also advises planting lilies in drain pipes, spreading sand round hostas 'if you know where they are', putting a toad in the strawberries and sowing poisonous aconites. ...'

So, can I have just a little sympathy for these silent creatures who are so numerous it's a complete waste of time attempting eradication? As much as I love every leaf and flower in our overstocked happy, confused collection of plants, shrubs and trees, I honestly feel there's enough to spare a little for the quiet molluscs who share our lives. That's not the view of my husband I would add, but then he's 'Management', I'm only 'staff'!

Joan Ilett gardens in Whitton, and submitted this piece which she wrote a while ago for her local CGS group's magazine. Nothing wrong with that! I like it so much I'm giving her the £10 garden gift voucher for it! Thanks Joan - Ed.