

## In Your Garden

*By Robert Blake*

### **Plants for awkward areas in the garden**

Roger Hiron, a keen plantsman from the age of two, gave a large turnout of the Gardeners' Club an enthusiastic and informative talk on a range of plants for use in difficult conditions. He started with some generic advice for ensuring the long term health of your plants.

We all know the rule that a rose should not be replaced by another rose on the same site as it will be sickly. The reason is that the soil will have been depleted of the essential nutrients that a new rose needs unless the area is allowed to recover for about seven years. What many of us do not know is that this rule applies to the multitude of plants in the Rosaceae family, including the apple, crab apple, cherry, pear, stone fruits, cotoneaster, hawthorn and spirea. Good quality roses are grown and lifted three times to different fields before being sold. They are more expensive to buy but will thrive as a result. If you are buying a climber then look for one where the main shoots are of a similar diameter, and dig a deep hole – the depth of your arm – as the roots go down some two to three metres, not outwards. The watering regime is also very important and after planting the interval should be increased gradually so that the plant gets used to surviving on its own.

If you have very poor soil then plants such as *Berberis gagnepainii*, *Buddleja davidii*, *Ceanothus praecox* 'Allgold', *Papaver orientale* 'Patty's Plum' (Oriental Poppy) and *Verbascum* 'Kynaston' will all thrive in a sunny position. The latter two plants are particularly attractive. A border that has damp soil and is in shade for much of the day is a useful place to grow woodland plants. The perennial foxglove, *Digitalis grandiflora* or *purpurea albiflora*, is ideal for these conditions as are *Clematis diversifolia hendersonii*, Hellebores for winter/spring flowering, *Hydrangeas*, *Mahonia japonica* or the smaller *aquifolium*, and *Primula sieboldii*, which is a beautiful plant with flower stems like sweet peas.

Dry shade under trees is not an hospitable place for most plants. Those that survive best are spring-flowering bulbs that disappear underground in summer before the soil dries out, whilst some evergreens and winter flowering plants also survive. Examples are *Bergenia cordifolia*, *Dryopteris filix-mas* (hardy fern), *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald 'n' Gold', *Geranium macrorrhizum* 'Ingwersen's Variety', *Helleborus poetidus* 'Wester Flisk', and *Vinca minor* 'Atropurpurea', which is a lesser periwinkle with attractive plum-purple flowers.

All these plants can be found online. An excellent compact and illustrated reference book is the RHS Good Plant Guide published by Dorling Kindersley. It contains numerous planting guides for different conditions.