

GARDEN NEWS



A WORD TO THE WISE

ANDREA BRUNSENDORF
HEAD GARDENER

When Thames Water announced that it was to introduce a hosepipe ban I smugly congratulated myself for choosing clary sage (*Salvia hormonium*) for the summer bedding scheme in the War of the Roses border. This variety of annual sage is a native of the area extending from the Mediterranean to Iran via the Crimea: it is tolerant of low rainfall and high heat. After the many months of dry weather, every gardener should have anticipated the imposition of water restrictions this summer and I put in an early order for 1500 of these attractive plants as I reckoned demand would be high.

We have used clary sage in this spot before, but I wasn't completely satisfied with the result, and I'm excited to have the opportunity to improve on that scheme by adding *Eucalyptus globulus* (grown as an annual) to break the monotony of such en masse planting and to add height to the overall design. The intense blue, rose and white bracts of the sage, which can reach 35cm or more, will act as a sturdy footing to the feathery, grey-green fronds of the eucalyptus, and create a rippling effect between the yew buttresses.

Fortunately, clary sage is a tough cookie and can survive a soaking as well as a drought, as what I hadn't anticipated was that the day the hosepipe ban came into force would mark the

beginning of a prolonged downpour. In fact, since April 05 131 mm of rain has fallen compared to 1 mm last year. On the principle that nothing in horticulture is certain, this soaking hasn't deterred us from continuing to install a 'leaky pipe' drip irrigation system into the beds, and place flagstones through the width of the High Border so that we can access the plants with watering cans.

At the moment it seems as though the summer months are going to be unsettled, so I may well turn to the medicinal properties of sage as a distillation of its seeds into an essential oil is said to dispel anxiety and insomnia. Dioscorides was convinced it stopped hair going grey, Matthiolus recommended it as a cure for headaches, Pliny pronounced it effective for snakebites and sores, and Culpeper was one of many herbalists who recommended it to help the memory, his recipe being 'a conserve made of the flowers'. There is also an ancient use of it for removing foreign objects from the eye (an occupational hazard for a gardener) which involves placing one of the sticky seeds into the eye which then adheres to the object making it easier to remove, hence one of its common names being 'clear-eye'. I somehow think I will only resort to using this method if my GP takes the advice of the Government and works from home during the Olympics ...