

Tale from the Garden!

Strong Autumn winds are a real pain! They blow the leaves off the trees, hastening the end-of-season clean-up operation, & then they have the habit of redistributing them just when you think you've swept them all away! Time was when every front garden would be surrounded by privet rather than fencing & hedges have many advantages: they filter wind rather than stopping it in its tracks, so they don't create the same turbulence as a solid fence or wall; they are wildlife friendly & make wonderful sites for nesting birds; & they hang on to fallen leaves at the base, preventing them from blowing all around the garden. Hedges look good too. They green up our surroundings & create beautiful natural boundaries. Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus* 'Rotundifolia') is one of the most versatile and popular hedging species. Cherry Laurel is often referred to as Common Laurel or Prunus hedging and boasts large, glossy-green foliage all year round. It is an excellent choice of hedge plant for dense evergreen hedging & makes an effective privacy screen. Cherry Laurel hedging can also minimise the effects of noise and wind and provides year-round interest to your garden. It's a very adaptable plant, tolerant of both full sun and full shade, and will thrive in all but waterlogged or chalky soils. Common Laurel is not only tolerant of various planting positions, it can also withstand very cold temperatures, making this hardy evergreen ideal for our British winters. The polished, bright-green leaves not only create a wonderful aesthetic feature in your garden but they also have great practical use as they reflect sunshine which can increase the amount of light in your garden. The creamy-white flower-cluster that appear in spring have a delicate sweet fragrance and are popular with bees. The berries that emerge in autumn, changing colour from red to black as the season passes, also provide wildlife value as they are a favourite amongst hungry birds. It's no wonder that the Laurel hedging species family is the UK's most popular landscape and garden shrub.



Facts you probably don't know about *Prunus Laurocerasus Rotundifolia* hedging –

- When crushed the leaves give off the scent of almonds, which is caused by the cyanolipids in the foliage that can release cyanide and benzaldehyde.
- *Prunus Laurocerasus Rotundifolia* is known by a number of different names which include: Cherry Laurel, Common Laurel, English Laurel, European Cherry Laurel, Laurier-armande, Cherry-bay and Versailles Laurel.
- Glendurgan's maze at Glendurgan National Trust Garden in Cornwall is made completely from Cherry Laurel. It has to be clipped between 3-5 times a year to keep it looking neat and all the cuttings have to be carried in baskets through the maze to the entrance to be disposed of – the gardeners in charge of pruning must know the maze like the back of their hand!

- The leaves of Common Laurel were used in the past by entymologists (scientists that study insects) to kill insect specimens without causing physical damage. This was done by sealing them in a container with crushed leaves. The crushed leaves can also be mixed with water and used to deter insect pests in the garden.
- During the 70s and 80s, Laurel was commonly used as a Christmas decoration, often hung up in shops and butchers, and Laurel wreaths are still used in commemoration ceremonies today.

Legends and traditions:

Daphne was a Naiad nymph in Greek mythology; naiads were minor goddesses associated with fountains, wells, springs, and other types of freshwater bodies. She was the daughter of either the river god Peneus and Creusa, or the river god Ladon. According to the myth, she was beautiful and her beauty caught the attention of the god Apollo. Apollo, who according to some sources had been struck by one of Eros' love-inducing arrows, started chasing Daphne; she tried to evade him, and just before she was caught, she pleaded to her father Peneus or to the goddess Gaea to save her. Her pleads were heard and she was transformed into a laurel tree. The laurel became the sacred tree of Apollo & from that day, Apollo wore a wreath of laurel on his head. Laurel wreaths became associated with what Apollo embodied; victory, achievement and status & would later become one of the most commonly used symbols to address achievement throughout Greece and Rome. In Rome, they were symbols of martial victory, crowning the successful commander during his triumphal return. Laurel wreaths were used to crown victorious athletes at the original Olympic Games & are still worn in Italy by university students who just graduated. Where ancient Laurel wreaths are most often depicted as a horseshoe shape, & modern versions are usually complete rings, this symbolism has been widespread ever since. In English, the word 'laureate' has come to signify eminence or association with literary awards or military glory. A person who is honoured with an award for outstanding creative or intellectual achievement is awarded a 'Nobel Laureate'.

The expression "resting on one's laurels" refers to someone relying entirely on long-past successes for continued fame or recognition, where to "look to one's laurels" means to be careful of losing rank to competition.

We've just had Remembrance Sunday when wreaths of poppies have been laid at War Memorials throughout the country. The laying of wreaths allows individuals and organisations to pay their respects and lay a tribute to individuals or groups, those who have laid down their lives for their country. It's worth remembering that, together, the circular shape and the evergreen material make the wreath a representation of eternal life & the idea of 'victory' over death.

And we'll soon be seeing another kind of wreath adorning our front doors. Advent and Christmas wreaths are constructed of evergreens to represent everlasting life brought through Jesus & the circular shape of the wreath represents God, with no beginning and no end. Advent and Christmas wreaths are now a popular symbol in preparation for and to celebrate the coming of Christ. Despite Covid-19, for every Sunday of Advent, starting with the fourth Sunday before Christmas on the 29th November, we'll be lighting our candles on the Advent wreath & remembering Jesus' victory ... which is our victory too.

