

Coping with cold weather

THE treadmill starts this week – yes, we are recording the first of 26 episodes of The Beechgrove Garden. In fact, there are already a couple of pieces “in the can”, as they say. Carolyn Spray visited Cambo Estate on the Fife coast in February to give us a flavour of the Snowdrops by Starlight festival. I can't wait to see that myself, it must be stunning. The other piece was filmed at Inverewe Gardens in Wester Ross at the beginning of last week. I paid a return visit there to see if winter had caused much damage. We tend to think that, since their weather is hugely influenced by the Gulf Stream, allowing them to grow an amazing range of semi-tropical plants from Australia and New Zealand, they get off scot-free. I'm not telling ye whit it is like – just wait and see.

There will certainly be lots of advice in this first programme on how to overcome some of the problems raised by the winter weather. But life in the garden goes on; there is much to do. The farmers around us have certainly got the bit between their teeth with these great behemoth machines which go into a ploughed field and, with one pass, pulverise the soil into a seedbed tith, spread the fertiliser and sow the seeds. The ground has to be sufficiently dried out to do



Carrot 'Ibiza'

that, an indication to those of us with much smaller areas to deal with that we should be gearing up for a bout of sowing and planting. As I have mentioned before, it is a good idea to cover areas that have been turned over with a sheet of stout polythene; not only does this help to dry the soil and prevent it from re-wetting, but the soil temperature will start to rise to the target figure of 7C which sees seeds start to germinate. In the meantime, our first batch of broad beans has been sown in cells, as have the

onion sets. They are sitting in the cold greenhouse, starting to show signs of growth and will grow away quite quickly when planted out. For the first time, my vegetable growing last year was confined to raised beds in which we still had carrots, leeks and spring cabbage going in to the winter. Because the carrot bed had been covered in snow for such a long time, there were some roots trapped underneath. But they came through perfectly well and were lifted two weeks ago. The variety was Ibiza. The leeks took a bit of a

hammering but we did salvage some. The spring cabbages were under Envirofleece, which collapsed on top of them this winter following the weight of the snow, but they have cleaned up quite well and will be ready in a few weeks. To speed up that job they will get a wee tonic in the form of a light dressing of sulphate of ammonia; in the old days we used nitro-chalk or nitrate of soda.

As always, there are a rash of questions about lawns. I heard one chap say that he has had the mower out already. Good gracious, it will be a while before mine is out of the shed. Well, that is not strictly true; it has been out already, but not to cut grass. I have already been over the lawn with the little electric scarifier. The operational height can be adjusted and I set it quite high so that I am barely scratching the surface and can tease out the dead grass and other detritus. The wee collection box is a bit of a waste of time so I let the stuff fly. When the job is done I collect it up using the rotary mower which has a much bigger collection box. I have another reason for doing it this way: the mower blades, in picking up the stuff, chop it up finely and it can then be added to the compost heap. That brings me to the next topic: what state is your compost heap/bin in? Have



GARDENING NOTES WITH JIM McCOLL

you an empty one sitting waiting for the first items of the year? You could fill it with some of the scarified material from the lawn. I have two bins which were cleaned out a week ago, after the last of the composted material was dug in to one of the raised beds. As a matter of interest, I have one of those expensive tumbler types and a prototype called the Bio-Orb that I was given years ago, imported from the US. Now I see a similar piece of kit



Above: The tumbler composter

Left: The Bio-Orb



is being advertised in the sundries catalogues. You can roll this thing to where the compost material is being collected, which mixes up the stuff already inside, and when you wish to use the compost, you can roll the whole caboodle to a plot and empty it out.

■ **The Beechgrove Garden 2011 starts on Monday, April 4, at 7.30pm on BBC One Scotland.**

Home from home

MAINS of Taymouth, the five-star estate at Kenmore, has launched a new phase of luxurious one and two bedroom buy-to-let holiday homes.

The Maxwells, located on the banks of Loch Tay, feature underfloor heating, granite worktops and solid oak finishings. Windows with Glen Lyon Tweed drapes offer outstanding views of the Highland scenery. Buyers can take advantage of the estate's experienced team who will look after all aspects of letting, providing a hassle-free holiday home.

Prices at The Maxwells start from £185,000. Kenmore is one of Highland Perthshire's most picturesque villages and Mains of Taymouth makes the most of its setting with its own golf course, stables, shop/delicatessen and bar/restaurant. Many more activities are on the doorstep, including fishing, walking, cycling and boating.

■ **To find out more, call Graham Clark on 07795 422911 or 01887 830 226, visit the website at www.mainsoftaymouth.co.uk, or e-mail gtc@mainsoftaymouth.co.uk**



The Maxwells, Loch Tay



Tulloch Homes' London one-bedroom end-terrace home

London calling

LONDON, Milan, New York and Paris are calling on Inverness, but no passports or long-distance travel arrangements are required for those wishing to visit.

For these are the names of the new homes available at Tulloch Homes new Upper East Side development at Milton of Leys, on the outskirts of the Highland capital. The newly launched City-style homes at Upper East Side aim to attract first-time buyers who have found it difficult to purchase a home of their own. Positioned on the southern escarpment of Inverness, overlooking the city, buyers will enjoy a peaceful location with local amenities and the buzz of the city nearby. "We are particularly excited about the launch of Upper East Side," said Carol MacRae, marketing director of Tulloch Homes.

"This is a new range of homes and the prices are positioned at a real entry level. "The style of these homes is very chic and European to appeal to younger buyers. The house types focus on the fashion centres of the world and coupled with the shared-equity offer, we are really

breaking down the barriers to kick-start the market for first-time buyers, young professionals in particular." The London one-bedroom end-terrace home is available from £71,250, with 75/25 shared equity arrangement on a full price of £95,000. Similarly, a two-bedroom New York City-style home is priced from £90,000, with 75/25 shared equity arrangement on the full price of £120,000. Other home styles include the Milan two bedroom terraced or semi-detached villa and the Paris two bedroom semi-detached villa. All the homes are built to a high standard with kitchens fitted with an integrated oven, hob and hood, free-standing washer dryer and fridge freezer. They also benefit from central heating, high performance UPVC double-glazing, private parking and landscaped gardens. Those buying here can take advantage of a scheme which, if they move on to a larger new Tulloch Home within five years, will see 5% of the 25% shared equity price used as a deposit for the new home.

■ **For more information on City-style at Upper East Side call 01463 772941 or visit www.citystyleinverness.com**

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* Source Hitwise February '11

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