



Gnash in the attic

With Micky, Minnie and Virginia all at home, it's a crowded house for Sir Roddy and Tania

LAST winter we had terrible problems with mice in the attic. It was not until the spring that Tania and I realised the damage they had caused after these nuisance rodents had chewed through everything from cashmere cardigans to CDs. Bars of soap were reduced to scattered crumbs.

We were puzzled as to how they got up there. I was told only the other day that mice use Virginia creeper, and presumably other climbers of similar habit like ivy, as ladders. Of course, Virginia is growing on that side of the house, and while she may look joyful in the autumn, she needed to be cut right back before Micky and Minnie were able to set up home and produce countless children in the warm and dry.



discolouration of leaves even in mid-summer along with sinister, black, boot lace-like threads under the bark, were easy to detect.

Professor David Bellamy acted promptly by encouraging schools to grow a species of elm (*Ulmus Sapporo 'Autumn Gold'*) originally from Japan. Of these trees, planted 30 years ago, many have thrived. The latest initiative 'The Great British Elm Experiment' (elms@conservationfoundation.co.uk), under the auspices of the Conservation Foundation, has been formed to encourage the experimental planting of young trees propagated from mature native elms that, for some reason, have not succumbed to the disease. The Foundation is looking to plant trees where they can be monitored for several years and so the first trees are being given to schools who can report on their tree's progress over the years. Gardeners, landowners and farmers are also welcome to take part.



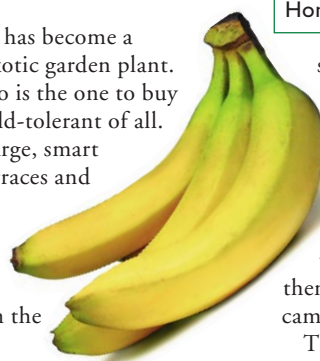
IHAVE been busy sowing a new lawn where there was once a mixed border that had become hopelessly choked with couch grass. Having sprayed it with Roundup in August, I rotovated, levelled and raked it clean before sowing. I chose seed as it is the cheaper alternative by far.

Normally September is the best time of year to sow or turf, but this particular month proved uncharacteristically dry this year so I waited until October. But then April is also supposed to be guaranteed on to be wet, but this year it was anything but. The weather is all upside down.

THE demise of the common elm in the UK back in the 1970s came as a terrible shock to those who owned majestic specimens of these beautiful trees. The damage caused by the elm bark beetle was first spotted in Gloucester having been carried into this country on imported elm timber from North America as early as 1928. It wasn't until the early 1970s that dead elms started to become such a dramatic feature of the British landscape. It soon spread like wildfire and by 1980 it was nationwide. Well over 20 million trees died. The tell-tale signs of infection, first the

THE banana has become a favourite exotic garden plant. *Musa basjoo* is the one to buy as it is the most cold-tolerant of all. There they sit in large, smart pots decorating terraces and patios, a perfect complement to any contemporary design. In warmer, coastal areas and in the micro-climate of larger cities they do not necessarily have to be given protection for the winter in the UK. In inland areas you would be advised to do so using either straw (not so easy to come across these days as fewer farmers make small bales) or a product similar to Agrifleece secured with string. Do not use anything like bubblewrap which, because it blocks off a free passage of air, can cause the plant to rot.

What is interesting about the banana is that it is the only fruit not to contain any



SIR RODDY LLEWELLYN GARDENING SEMINARS 2009

A change of venue due to popularity of the October courses has been decided for Sir Roddy Llewellyn's future garden seminars which he says are the most informative (and interesting) on the circuit. Entitled Understand Gardening, the next two courses will be held at Whichford Pottery on Thursday, November 26 and Thursday, December 3. Aimed at those wanting a good grounding in the basics of gardening, subjects covered will include: Which are the most useful tools?, Which are the most useful books, How to cope with weed infestations, Understanding the British climate, What is soil?, What is mulch?, How to take cuttings, Useful plants for difficult sites and poor soils, Why prune and when?, When is the best time to plant, and What's the easiest way to grow vegetables".

Whichford Pottery is located in the village of Whichford, near Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire, CV36 5PG. The price of £95 per day is inclusive of a light lunch. Guests should arrive for a 10am start. A charitable donation of 10 per cent of all ticket sales will go to Shipston-on-Stour Home Nursing.

seeds. The only way to propagate it, therefore, is to remove the small plants from its base and plant them on separately. The original banana plant used to bear fruit full of seeds with little pulp. Since time immemorial man has selected the fruits with fleshier fruits and grew them on from their seed until the time came when they contained no seed at all.

The banana is essentially a forest floor plant. It likes shade therefore, and hates growing in too windy a position which results in the leaves being torn. Bananas are, what is known in the trade, as 'gross feeders' and they like lots of water and regular doses of high nitrogen feed. Do not expect to produce fruit in our climate; just enjoy the magnificent foliage. A nursery that stocks exotic plants of every kind is Architectural Plants, Nuthurst, Horsham, W. Sussex RH13 6LH (01403 891772). By growing one you will be helping to perpetuate this fascinating species. ■