

Spring has Sprung

I think we are all aware that Spring is arriving earlier each year and I for one think it's great. The first sighting of snowdrops, primroses and aconites lift my heart. Years ago it seemed that winter dragged on and on. Darkness at three, bitterly cold February's and a miserable March. Now it seems so different. I never thought I would see acacia bursting with bright yellow blossom in the first week of March but I have spotted three magnificent examples just on my doorstep. One in a front garden in Erskine Hill, one on the cut through from Willifield Way to the Orchard and the best example of all in a back garden on Asmunds Hill. This can be seen from the rubbish bin enclosure in the Orchard! Climb the steps and you have an excellent vantagepoint. This beautiful tree was bursting with masses of golden yellow candyfloss sprays. I can remember years ago when florists poked mimosa into sprays of flowers (usually multi-coloured carnations), they don't seem to do it anymore maybe it was just a fashion.

My front patch has again done me proud, sarcococca, daphne and edgeworthia creating wonderful aromas and perfume around the doorway. Another little treasure at the front and often overlooked is coronella a delicate shrub flowering all through the winter. A gentle lemon perfume from a yellow flower on slightly blueish foliage. The pulmonaria hasn't let me down and as ever a reliable doer. There are many varieties to choose from so do not feel restricted to the bog standard

pink/blue spotted leaf variety. I have a bright sapphire blue with plain dark leaves called Munstead Blue and another similar one called Blue Ensign. Sissinghurst White as a contrast alongside the snowdrops, primroses and hellebores make a delightful woodland corner. I also had a sprinkling of purple crocuses unfortunately they seem to be a favourite of the local squirrel population. Seeing them wearing my season's crocuses is not much fun. I don't have much time for the squirrel and has become another pet hate along with the dreaded slug.

February saw a trip for the Hort. Soc. organised by yours truly. Yes a gardening trip in February. Bennington Lordship in the morning followed by lunch in a local pub used on a previous trip and on to the snowdrops at Hatfield. That was the plan. Unfortunately the pub changed hands a week before the trip and the new landlord didn't want us. Maybe it was because we had trashed it previously, no, just extremely poor business acumen. Hatfield House also didn't want us it was decided that the garden would not be opened to anyone during its snowdrop season disappointing a lot more than a coachload of North London gardeners. The reason being the sad death of the sixth marquis. All was not lost. We managed to find a new pub and my frantic search led to Middleton House on the outskirts of Enfield, who kindly opened the garden just for our benefit.

Bennington Lordship had a stunning array of snowdrops around the moat area balanced

by the tranquil landscaped gardens a delight even in winter. We also had the opportunity to purchase snowdrops 'in the green' eagerly taken by our group.

Lunch was more than hearty, but the biggest surprise was Myddleton. It was originally the home of E. A. Bowles the gardens are now in the later stages of restoration. The undulating woodland area was spectacularly beautiful the trees surrounded by swathes of differing varieties of snowdrops spreading out like a carpet. A particularly memorable sight. Another was the massively impressive wisteria obviously not in flower but when it is must be worth the admission fee alone. All in all what could have been a mini disaster turned into a hugely enjoyable day out. On top of that the publican said he would have us back! A result all round.

On a practical note if anyone wants to come on any of the summer trips don't leave it until the last minute as the places fill up thick and fast. Hidcote/Kiftsgate on June 12 and Wisley on August 18 (this one is members only, at a reduced rate). Book now as he that hesitates is lost as my mum says. The Horticultural Society on May 6th has invited Matt Clawson to give a practical demonstration on creation and maintenance of hanging baskets. If his baskets are as good as his window displays (at Kristal) then we are in for a treat. Matt has a very good eye for colour and a hint of the outrageous.

After being hopefully inspired by Matt we have our annual plant sale on May 15th allowing you to put your ideas into action and



making your own statement so there's another date for your diary.

On a different note, have I mentioned Mr Green Thumb, no not Tom Thumb or the Green Giant. Mr. Green Thumb is the name of the company I have put in charge of maintaining my front lawn. For his not unreasonable fee he will weed and feed my lawn four times per year. I no longer have to worry about or remember to push the gadget up and down the lawn wondering if I have put too much weedkiller in the mix or that the mix is evenly distributed. He has also aerated and scarified the lawn granted at extra cost but saves me the hassle and associated difficulty. The aeration was amazing; a machine akin to a lawnmower covered the whole area removing clay plugs leaving me just to sweep them off at the end. The scarifying is due any day now. I'm a little concerned that all I will be left with is a ploughed and muddy field. Watch this space.

If anyone is interested in this service the telephone number is 01707 378536.

As we step into May keep a sharp eye on the roses just in case greenfly attack the new growth. You can pick them off but if you are really fussy like me you may wish to start spraying with a suitable fungicide to prevent disease taking hold. Towards the end of May it should be fine to put out all the summer bedding in pots, troughs, baskets etc. It's quite a good idea to put Osmacote in the soil - this is a slow release food as we do expect an awful lot from pots of petunias, verbenas and summer bedding plants. Keep mowing the lawns and in the next couple of months you can lower the blades of the mower. Tip: never shave the lawn just in case we have a dry spell. Gladiola and Dahlia tubers can be planted out not forgetting to have the stakes and supports in ready for the big push.

In June, give perennials, shrubs and roses a feed; tie in the climbing roses to their supports. Remove the foliage of the spring bulbs after they have died down. You can also give acid-loving plants a feed of Miracid particularly if

the leaves are yellowing, skimmias and camellias spring to mind.

If you find that your flowering shrubs are getting a little on the large side, weigela, deutzia and ceanothus to name but three it is best to prune them in July. Lift and divide congested flag irises after they have flowered; this avoids a great mass of dead rhizomes in the centre and flowers on the edge. There is always something to do but never forget to sit back, savour and enjoy your garden.

Sunday 18th of July gives you an opportunity to visit other local gardens on Suburb Summer Gardens Day further details nearer the day.

My allotment is a work in progress. In March I planted four rows of onions, three rows of broad beans joining my previously planted raspberry canes. The wigwams for the French Climbing Beans will be in situ shortly and I am determined to grow more baby carrots. My plot is small but manageable enough not to drive me mad. Until next time...Good Gardening

DIANE BERGER

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HGS rainwatch

The pattern of rainfall in the first three months of 2004 has been similar to that of 2003. An above average quantity for January has been followed by below average amounts for February and March. January saw a total of 3½ inches while February had ¼ inches and March had 1½ inches meaning that, for the first three months of the year rainfall was below average, but not much.

Last year, the amounts for February and March were even

lower and were, of course, followed by an exceptionally dry and pleasant summer.

This year the winter six months, as a whole, have also been somewhat below average. This contrasts with last year when, despite the dry start to 2003, the winter six months received over a third more rainfall than the present year. Also, unlike this year, it followed a very wet summer. Last summer's lack of rain means gardens start

from a very different baseline this year. Despite the assurances of the water boards, one has to wonder whether in this part of the country the underground reservoirs have really been fully replenished. Never mind. We have apparently been forecast a rather poor summer so we may well get what rain we need even if we do not really want it then. One can always invest in a second rainwater butt.

DIANA IWI

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