

# Naturalising spring bulbs

As I write this it's pouring with rain, a welcome relief after a couple of weeks of scorching 30°C temperatures, because now I can plant my spring bulbs. It seems counter intuitive to be thinking about next spring when we are still enjoying an Indian summer, but if you are aiming for year round interest in your garden then this is precisely what you

should be doing. Jolly 'hosts' of daffodils highlighting every grass verge, and parks department tulip patchworks can't fail to lift the spirits after a long winter, but to my mind they are a touch too bold for domestic gardens. So I'm going all delicate! And that lends itself to naturalising – in your lawns, rough grass under trees,

bare earth under hedges, border strips under windows, in fact in every awkward and neglected crevice you can find. Masses of small jewels to surprise and delight you when winter is getting boring and everything is drab. With a bit of forward planning you can have a succession of spring flowering bulbs from January right through to June.

First to appear, often when there is still snow on the ground, are snowdrops, usually planted 'in the green', which simply means planting them when they are still in leaf, rather than as a dried bulb. For early spring chionodoxa luciliae, Glory of the Snow, will soon colonise areas of lawn in dappled shade, its diminutive pale-blue flowers highlighted against the background of dark-green grass.

The crocus flowers in January and February, forming large long-lived clumps that will spread very quickly in lawns and borders alike. Other late winter and early spring gems are anemone blanda, iris reticulata, muscari, & scilla. Plant winter aconites in dappled shade for flowers in February and March. Multi headed and often fragrant jonquilla narcissi are a must, with varieties flowering from February through to May.

There is no need to neglect damp areas either. Erythronium, the dog's tooth violet, grows well in short grass, particularly around deciduous trees. Enjoy its marbled foliage with short pink or mauve flowers in early April. Into May, the native

snakeshead fritillary, with its purple chequerboard flowers, will even thrive in flood meadows, while tall blue camassia will flourish in boggy conditions in May and June.

Right now is the time to plant your spring flowering bulbs: the longer they have in the ground the more time they have to settle in, the stronger the blooms. For maximum impact plant in drifts, no less than 20 bulbs of the larger types such as camassia, right up to 50 or 100 of the smallest varieties such as winter aconites. The most economical way of purchasing bulbs in quantity is by mail order.

Broadcast the bulbs onto the desired patch of ground for natural looking distribution. When naturalising in grass, the quickest method of mass planting is to slice under the turf with a sharp spade and roll it back, exposing the soil. Plant bulbs into the exposed soil and replace the turf. For planting small bulbs into turf make holes by pushing the prongs of a garden fork into grass and moving them around gently, being careful not to skewer your toes! Ensure that the holes are wide enough so that the bulb drops right to the bottom. If the area is particularly moist some gravel sprinkled into the hole before planting will aid drainage. One of the main reasons gardeners give up planting bulbs in their borders is constant theft by squirrels. Guard against this by planting as deep as you can then placing

a layer of chicken wire over the top of them before covering with soil.

The difficulty arises in deciding when to mow. Resist the urge to make the first cut as soon as the bulbs have finished flowering as the mature foliage is needed to feed and ripen the bulb for the following year. Wait until the foliage has begun

to turn yellow before cutting or you will weaken them, and that can mean 4-6 weeks in the case of narcissi. Early flowering perennials such as hellebores, pulmonaria, brunnera & cyclamen make ideal planting partners, enhancing your border displays and disguising the dying foliage as it fades.

CAROLINE BROOME



## HGS Horticultural Society news



MARJORIE HARRIS

opening private gardens across England & Wales for charity, and as part of the celebrations, Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society will open some of its most beautiful gardens for the NGS as a group for the first time on Sunday June 25 from 12noon-5.30pm.



Grimsdyke Brass Band

As well as opening the garden gates of nine private gardens and one of the numerous allotment sites, there will be home-made teas at Fellowship House and two professional nurseries will sell seasonal plants in the garden. There will be face painting and a treasure trail for children, and

a raffle for the grown-ups! Maps will be provided to guide visitors to the Open Gardens via the Suburb's roads, twittens and woods. Full details will appear nearer the time, but put the date in your diary now!

MARJORIE HARRIS



Jim Buttress opens the show

MARJORIE HARRIS

The Horticultural Society has had a successful summer, culminating in the Autumn show held at the Free Church Hall on September 10. The rain poured down almost all day, but people came just the same. The society was very honoured to have Jim Buttress VMH to judge the Horticulture classes and open the show.

Terry Rand's truly enormous pumpkin, cradled in a wheelbarrow, was much admired! Around 200 visitors flocked to the show and were entertained once again by the wonderful Grimsdyke Brass Band, this time inside the hall due to the rain. Spring bulbs were on sale and dozens of delicious teas were enjoyed.

David Weinberg of Willifield Way won the society's 2016 Suburb in Bloom competition and will receive the Millennium Cup at the AGM on 8 November at Fellowship House at 7.30pm. Don't forget to pick up your own cups and prize money at the AGM if you were successful at the shows too.

A large group enjoyed a three-day visit to gardens in Somerset and there were also trips to Chenies Manor Plant Fair and RHS Wisley Plant Fair. Six members opened their gardens for the National Gardens Scheme.

In 2017 the National Gardens Scheme celebrates 90 years of

## Suburb rainfall

Yet again, this column must report that rainfall in the Suburb has not been quite up to general predictions in the weather forecasts for the country. By the time of writing we have been anxiously waiting to see when the rain will arrive to save our plants, make our last beans grow, or even just justify taking out an umbrella. Time after time in the last three months we have been disappointed and have had to empty our rainwater butts or use our taps. It is such a nuisance to unwind the hosepipe when we are shown lovely depressions about to sweep over us. This time we are right to feel aggrieved as, at just over three inches, rainfall for the period has been less than half the norm. Not only that, but also 2016 had the second lowest figure for July to

September since 1980, with only 2003 being drier. Of course, looking on the bright side, we could enjoy being in the open without getting wet, but the soil became so dry that digging or weeding became impossible. 'Good sunny periods' seems to have been the most common description of the previous day's weather so the thunderstorm in mid-September provided rather a solitary example of excitement.

Looking at the year so far, the slightly above average rain in the first six months have meant that the year's total does not look likely to be anything too out of the ordinary. However, there is no reason to suppose that this suggestion is any more reliable than other long term forecasting.

DIANA IWI  
FROM MEADWAY



Diane Berger with her Patrinia Scabiosifolia

NIGEL SUTTON

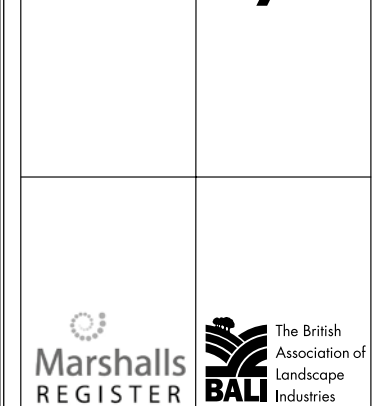
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