

May In My Garden
(Andrew the Gardener)

"One of the greatest virtues of gardening is this perpetual renewal of youth and spring of promise of flower and fruit that can always be read in the open book of the garden by those with an eye to see and a mind to understand.

E.A. Bowles

Could you ever tire of describing the spring? Simply no, every year is so very different. A short stroll along the lane and this year's spring collection is revealed, each hedgerow a floral catwalk of the season's current fashion. This year pink campion, stitchwort and cow parsley are particularly en vogue whilst an exotic looking early purple orchid the must have accessory.

After the hottest and one of the driest Aprils ever recorded it is somewhat of a relief to return to wetter, temperate and seasonally normal weather for a change. Roses are starting to flower already whilst the ash trees struggled a little to come into leaf after such a dry spring, it is definitely an "oak before ash" year.

In the garden badgers dig holes everywhere. I think they are looking for cockchafers, a large white grub that lives in the soil eating plant roots and turning into a may bug; those large brown beetles that bang noisily against the window panes on warm evenings.

An attractive small tree that I grew from a conker is *Aesculus Flava*, the yellow buckeye. It has the typical horse chestnut type of flowers but in shorter candelabras than the white and pink types. They are a pleasing acid yellow colour, looking particularly fresh against the bright young leaves. It will grow into a small rounded tree and has very fine orange and yellow autumn colours. It is also one of the first trees to start turning, some years entirely losing its leaves by the end of September.

On the opposite side of the garden grow my collection of brooms, "Radiance" has ivory and dark orange flowers, "Windlesham Ruby" mahogany red and ruby red whilst "Cornish Cream" is exactly that, pure primrose and moonlight. Amongst the brooms I have made a raised bed from large stones like a sort of rocky outcrop. I planted three deciduous azaleas here, a pink, a cream and a yellow. The flowers smell especially strongly on a sunny morning and I have underplanted with bluebells as they flower at the same time.

The last primrose to flower is called "Chartreuse". The petals are very leafy and cool avocado green like the leaves themselves with a yellow eye. They opened at the back end of April and will continue into June. They share a bed with *Lunaria rediviva*, collected as seeds from the rocky slopes of the castle at Deva in Transylvania. It is a perennial honesty with pale lilac flowers and slightly more elliptical seed pods than the biennial types.

In the orchard two late flowering fruit trees, the quince and the Medlar, give a display every bit as good as any flowering tree. Related to pears the quince has large apple blossom flowers that could rival a magnolia whilst the medlar is pure white, almost 2" across and a relative of the hawthorns.

"Who doffs their coat on a winter's day will gladly put it on in May." Despite the mild weather and early season my grass was white with frost this morning (19th). Don't be too hasty to plant out your geraniums and runner beans, summer's not quite here yet.