

In My Garden, March

“It is through celebration that we become part of what we perceive: the great arc of birdsong – that runs around the world in the receding darkness and through which we are swept into the light of day – is as much part of the dawn as the sun’s first flash”.

NORMAN MOMMENS

March swings both ways. Think of March and we think of catkins, baa-lambs, pussy willows and daffodils, the very essence of springtime; we get our evenings back, drawing out as the clocks change and the solstice brings longer days than nights for the next six months. However, in reality March can sometimes be the last month of winter, not the first of spring, and quite often things are hardly more advanced by the end of the month than there were at the start.

Ribes sanguineum flowers in March. The flowers hang fuchsia-like festooned along its stems, on all the growths it made the previous year. Ranging from white to scarlet it is wise only to buy this plant whilst it is in flower as some of the pink shades can be a little washed out and insipid, and please don’t grow it with daffodils or Forsythia, their rich yellow clashes awfully! I grow two varieties: “Album” which is pure white and “Edward VII” which is one of the finest rich crimson forms. Incidentally it is a very easy flower to force. Long stems can be cut around the new year, placed in water somewhere dark and warm where the buds soon begin swelling and flowers, the softest baby pink colour will appear a month or so later.

Toward Langham along the lane grows a much overlooked and unassuming little plant, Adoxa moschatellina, the Moschatel. Growing just a few inches high it thrives on the cool north facing bank under the almost constant drip from overhanging trees. The tiny flowers grow in a little cluster on the end of thin stalks and are the same pale cucumber green as the leaves. There are usually five altogether, four of which face to the north, the south, the east and the west whilst the fifth faces upward. Flowering in Lent and said to be “a symbol of Christian watchfulness” another of its names is Town hall clock.

Immortalised by poets and composers for centuries March sees the start of the great dawn chorus. The blackbird’s fluty warble, the thrushes chirrup as he stands proudly on his perch like a bird in a fable, the robin’s mournful tee-cha tee-cha or the lark’s ascending twitter as they hover in the skies above the fields at the top of my garden. This joyous singing will fill our days from dawn to dusk for the next four months or so until nests are emptied and broods raised. But would this persistent avian chattering sound quite so mellifluous if we understood its language? The defensive territorial threats and boasts of sexual prowess could seem more akin to the aggressive chants of a football match or the bawdy banter of a lads’ night out.

In the borage family Trachystemon orientalis opens dark blue fading lighter and ending up a pinkish blue earning it the name Abraham-Isaac-Jacob. Like a giant forget-me-not the flowers begin opening close to the ground and the flower spike gradually expands to a foot high. Not a plant I would recommend for a small garden as its dormant sandpaper rough leaves soon overpower any less vigorous plants nearby. I grow it in only the most out of the way wild area of my garden where it relishes the cool, damp shade and can spread to its heart’s content.

In March my expectations are high, the waxing sun is gaining in strength now And I optimistically hope for spring but am often frustrated by the season’s tardiness. The door to springtime is merely ajar not fully opened yet.