

In My Garden – November

“the thinnest yellow light of November is more warming and exhilarating than any wine they tell of. The mite which November contributes becomes equal in value to the bounty of July.”

Henry David Thoreau.

This rain, rain, rain! Relentless, ceaseless, constant, unyielding rain! Little streams of water now run everywhere as the over-saturated land oozes, drips, squelches, trickles and seeps. The ground underfoot feels like the flesh of an over-ripe peach. Just to walk from one side of the garden to the other becomes a treacherous procedure. Better to keep off the soil at present how ever much work needs doing, the structure will be ruined if you tramp about all over it right now.

Arum italicum “Pictum” is a variegated form of our wild arum or Cuckoo Pint, Parson-in-the-Pulpit, Lords-and-Ladies or any number of other local names. The leaves are a shiny apple green with wide grey markings along the central veins giving it a slightly reptilian appearance. The sticks of glistening orange berries, so unquestionably dangerous, ripen in October but to me the main point of interest is the new foliage emerging so refreshing and spring-like just as everything else is dying back and looking horrid. They will glisten in the winter sunshine looking attractive right up until the beginning of summer.

Lonicera lineate is the sort of municipal plant you would find in a council or supermarket car park clipped appallingly and surrounded by litter. Dwarf twiggy growth with small narrow leaves and flowers about a quarter of an inch long in the most unremarkable pale lemon-green bordering on camouflage. It would take a botanist’s eye to see that it is actually a honeysuckle. But during November it has the sweetest tiny violet-coloured berries that glisten like the beads you would find in an old-fashioned sewing box, particularly uplifting on a drear autumn day.

As irises go, *Iris foetissima* is a rather drab one, the small dull mauve flowers appear during May in spikes of three or four completely outshone by more flamboyant blooms. Known as the Stinking Iris, the foliage has an unpleasant meaty smell too, there does not seem very much to recommend it. But come autumn, as the fat green seed pods split open like an erupting firework to reveal magnificently bright orange seeds, all its shortcomings are soon overlooked. That will tolerate some of the deepest shade so long as there is a degree of moisture. Ideal back of the border planted where they are obscured during the summer by more ostentatious flowerers, they will have their time to shine later after those other flowers are long dead and gone.

Despite all this never-ending rain there has been some lovely weather too. Standing at the top of my garden this morning (the 11th) in warm blazing sunshine during a respite from heavy showers, the breath-taking display put on by the oaks and beeches over in the nature reserve was stunning; coppers, russets, burnt sienna, rust, mahogany, amber and gold. In front of me *Verbena*, *Buddleia* and late Dutch honeysuckle still have enough flowers out to entice comma and red admiral butterflies and a queen hornet all busily going about their business collecting a final drink of nectar, a last fling before it gets too cold; Mother Nature’s farewell to the end of another growing season.

“Look they’re wearing little hats as they start to grow”. I had just turned four and was standing in my Grandmother’s greenhouse whilst she was demonstrating to me the process of germination and how sometimes the testa or seed coat still remains on the cotyledons as they begin to grow. She had sown some sunflower seedlings in a little pot for me, and I was utterly captivated. I would like to dedicate this article to her memory for sowing the seeds, both literally and figuratively for my life-long passion and career in horticulture.

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