

In My Garden, April

“Beauty is a form of genius – is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts in the world like sunlight, or springtime, or the reflection in dark water of that silver shell we call the moon”.

OSCAR WILDE

“April makes his own weather”, most years April is a meteorological assortment; we should be anticipating a mix of everything, every season in one day. Two out of the last ten years however have seen completely sunny rainless Aprils so also expect the unpredictable as well.

Holly Blues, delicate and beautiful; these butterflies visit the garden on sunny days. Having two generations per year the spring batch of caterpillars feeding off holly until June with adults appearing in August. These in turn lay eggs on ivy and winter as pupæ fastened to the leaves by a thread of silk, making the spring generation strictly speaking “Ivy” Blues. Ivy is such a good plant for wild life. It offers winter protection for many species and hidden places for various birds to nest too. It flowers so very late they are one of the last sources of nectar for Vanessa butterflies (peacocks, red admirals and commas etc), as well as queen wasps and hornets and many other creatures before they finally hibernate. In addition the berries, the first fruits of the year, ripen in March and April and are gorged upon by blackbirds and thrushes.

Primroses are the flowers of the month at their peak for the duration. Even the smartest florist’s polyanthus given three shakes of a bee’s knee sows its wild oats about the place promiscuously crossing with any feral primrose in range. I love their illegitimate progeny, the unplanned seedlings, the bastard mauves and bastard pinks and bastard peachy shades as the sophisticated highly selected cultivated strains gradually over generations revert to the wild.

Visiting people become easily separated into sheep and goats, some love it others I find just do not “Get” the garden however much explaining I care to do. I can instantly tell by their slightly bemused disappointed expressions. It will never be a smart or tidy garden. I want it to be wild and informal merging seamlessly as possible into the fields and woods beyond. However, I collect plants; I have perhaps 200 different shrubs, trees and herbaceous, maybe 100 different roses too. I want to exhibit these and show them off as specimens where ever possible growing naturally in their own space.

Continually I am asked what my favourite flower is, well, right now; tulips, pheasant eye daffodils, every different shade and shape primroses come in, Camellias, wood anemones and bluebells, as the season changes so does my opinion, ficklely transforming as the year progresses. Each flower in its turn. Who indeed desires a rose at Christmas? Snowdrops too, are unwanted weeds for June. In line with my flower for every day philosophy I try not to have too many plants in bloom at once. My aim is to have a steady trickle of interest, not deluges or droughts; a bowl that brims with water but never overflows. Then when I’m asked the next most frequent question, “When is your garden at its best?” I never imagined one of those gardens where they always say, “Oh, you should have been here last week when so and so was out” or “wait until next month when such and such blooms”, for me “best” is always here, each day; I try to live in the present as much as I possibly can. Right at this very moment now, it is wonderful! The garden consistently attains perfection all the time.