

In My Garden, October

“First how the weather has changed, & we are on the verge of winter. Our clocks were put back on Sunday night, simultaneously I went into thick clothes; the sun lost half its heat, the nights became bitterly cold; we began to burn wood before tea; to dine by lamplight; & to shiver without fur coats on our beds.”

VIRGINIA WOOLF 2/10/18

It's the time of year summer only gardeners migrate inside, hibernating as clocks go back, only to awaken at Easter with the swallows return; a quick spending spree at the garden centre then settle down nonchalantly into summer.

Houseplants put out in May for their summer holiday are brought inside as the nights become dangerously cold. A lemon tree, Agave and various succulents, Christmas cacti, geraniums and a maiden hair fern all enjoyed some summer warmth and air al fresco. The fern I have grown for years and years. It thrives on forgetfulness and neglect. Kept away from sun and only ever remembered to water as the leaves turn greyish green and flag, never potted, only ever fed on a little cold tea. Incidentally, it's Latin name, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, is not referring to the maiden's hair upon her head...

One of the very final roses still blooming is 'Madame Alfred Carrière', an old-fashioned Noisette climber, flushed pink looking almost white unless close up. Although vigorous, it's not the hardiest of roses, a cold winter causing some die-back. One of the first roses to start flowering and one of the last to finish. Its long and whippy stems need experienced managing otherwise it gets out of hand or unsightly when pruned uncaringly; it won't thank you for trying to prune it like a rambler or hybrid-tea.

Stunning in October, another rose, 'Scarletfire' is smothered in shining scarlet rounded hips that last all winter. It already put on quite a show back in summer when the single scarlet flowers five inches across bloomed for eight weeks. The new growths are very attractive and scarlet too. It is a cross with a wild *Rosa gallica* and a Hybrid-Tea. Often seem as a climber it also makes a substantial bush too, growing 6' x 6' in its first season alone.

Another rose that just keeps giving is *Rosa fedtschenkoana*, a wild briar from Russia with ghostly greyish leaves and raspberry coloured prickles on the new growths. The flowers are small, white and single with a sort of damp citrus fragrance, very unrose like though not wholly unpleasant either. Even on a fair-sized bush it never has more than a smatter of flowers out at any one time, maybe only dozen or so, but remaining this way from late spring into autumn. It is part of the ménage a trois of parents to make-up the autumn damask rose. It still gives a late show with blooms and pale orange ripening hips appearing together.

Such awkwardness when generous well meaning friends buy you stuff for the garden, usually inappropriate to one's taste or just plain wrong for the location. I am far too green-fingered to get away with the "I tried but it died" story, so often the bloody things get planted; then they are enquired about with most boring regularity as to their status and condition. A good cold winter conveniently "kills" much unwanted stuff; the purple leaved peach, every chrysanthemum, a hateful orange rose and a ghastly vibrantly painted colossal tea cup and saucer (mercifully) crumbled to oblivion by frosts. Why not put this unwanted garbage directly on the bonfire, that way the minute amount of potash they produce can at least be of benefit to something else far more desirable!

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