

## **In My Garden, March.**

"Each leaf,  
each blade of grass vies for attention.  
Even weeds  
Carry tiny blooms  
To astonish us."

MARIANNE POLOSKEY

The bulbs cost 30 pence each, three planted in a pot last November on the kitchen windowsill, watched closely everyday; seldom such little money gives such amusement and joy. Tortoisely slow at first they've shot up hare-wise suddenly in flower and now the whole house smells of Hyacinths. The newer orange and yellow shades are excellent. At one of my employments on a private estate we grew hundreds of hyacinths in a whole range of colours; plants brought-on or retarded depending on the needs of the house. The quickest blooms were forced in the boiler room. Though if we were not careful the warm and humid atmosphere caused botrytis, grey mould appearing as the buds perished. The orange 'Gypsy Queen' and yellow 'City of Haarlem' were by far the worst, rotting away, just for a pass-time, whilst you're left explaining to the house staff why a flower request isn't fulfilled. The newer 'Gypsy Princess' and 'Apricot Passion' have far better constitutions than these older types. We planted each bulb in a 3½" pot, each flower spike delicately supported; tethered with raffia to a sharpened split cane secreted amongst the flowers, pushed directly down into the stem and right through the bulb. Hyacinths will establish in the garden, although after subjection to this sort of treatment as well as being forced, they take a few seasons to recover. The white variety 'L'Innocence' always seemed to re-establish well.

You never see the Roman Hyacinths offered of sale that often. A step closer to their bluebell ancestors, *Hyacinthus orientalis* 'albulus', having up to a dozen smaller thinner flower spikes per bulb; no fiddling with raffia required. Frost tender conservatory subjects they only come in pink or white or blue but their fragrance is by far the most out-standing.

Through my career various places wanted narcissus for winter decoration. 'Paper Whites' for Christmas; their cloying smell also carries a slight whiff of babies' nappies about it, in my opinion. Slightly later, to see the New Year in, I prefer the yellow 'Grand Soleil d'Or', (known colloquially as "Sally Door"), it has a fresher lighter smell evocative of spring-time. Kept cool in an unheated conservatory or porch they will as with the hyacinths last easily three weeks. Delivered en mass, moss covered in their ornamental bowls on Friday afternoon with buds just showing colour. By Monday morning after the deathly torture of highly heated drawing rooms the flowers over-blown, reduced to desiccated husks. The bulbs entirely spent and exhausted by fighting for their lives far beyond trying to save for future years.

This is a very good time of year to move and divide snowdrops. They can actually be moved at anytime but most popularly they are planted "in the green". Over time clumps multiply until they become too congested and gradually flowering diminishes. Lifted and divided after flowering they appear again next February as if nothing has happened. Single bulbs after a few seasons will make sizable clusters. In front of my cottage I have some big colonies of a tall growing big flowered snowdrop called 'Atkinsii' I will spread them all over a grassy bank to give the maximum display. So tough and forgiving these little bulbs don't even seem to mind if you move them in full flower. What they really hate is if the bulb dries out, this is the common state of bulbs sold commercially in the autumn and these are the least likely to thrive.

Longer days and warmer weather finishes the snowdrops off, succeeded by this month's daffodils it will bring on April's tulips.