

In My Garden, November and December

"I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure of the landscape - the loneliness of it, the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it, the whole story doesn't show."

ANDREW WYETH

At seven in the morning a full moon shines out over a silvery garden, we've now had the first proper Dahlia slaying frosts. This coldness strikes a chill as harsh as the frost itself into the hearts of summer only gardeners. Killing off the last dregs of summer it's now time for winter work to begin in earnest and to draw up plans for the coming new year.

An exciting tree has just been delivered with a peculiar name:

+Laburnocytissus adamii. The "+" denoting a chimera or graft hybrid. In the 1820's a Parisian nursery was growing standards of purple broom by grafting it onto a Laburnum stem, the two species are very closely related. One of these was broken and damaged but from where the union of the two plants had been a curious shoot grew with foliage half way between the laburnum and broom. I have to say it makes a rather unattractive tree, the growth is like a somewhat shrubby laburnum and the flowers an unpretty muddy pink. However there are other coloured flowers too, about 20 percent of the tree remains pure laburnum whilst a tiny amount of purple broom also thrives as wiry stemmed tufts amongst the branches. Twelve years or so ago there were various gardens opened in the village as a fund raising event for charity. A very new incomer to the village at the time, I became disoriented and ended up in a wrong garden, just off the village square. In this garden was the most spectacular Adam's laburnum in a perfect flush of full flower, by far the best specimen I'd ever seen (an exceptional crimson hawthorn next to it too), in the half dozen or so open gardens this was without doubt the most interesting plant to be seen that afternoon.

After a promising start today the sky soon clouded and a grey lid of gloominess spread across the heavens; it was not long before there was steady and heavy rain. I detest working in these conditions as it's very bad for the soil if you keep tramping about all over it when it is wet. I changed tack and bought baskets of logs inside instead and my lemon tree too. Lemons are one of the hardiest of citrus fruits but even so its time spent alfresco can be somewhat of an ordeal in my garden with night time temperatures even in summer too cool for its tastes.

I was staying in Barbados seven years ago and every evening at my hotel bar from half past five to half past six they held an "attitude adjustment" hour. The bar and restaurant were right on the beach with the sea lapping up against one side of it. Two drinks for the price of one soon creates a high spirited ambience in any bar, but here at around a quarter past six a hush gradually descends as the customers begin looking around and orienting themselves towards the west; the sun has started its descent below the horizon. Dawn and dusk are very short events on the island with only a brief period of change between afternoon and night, the rapid transit from bright sunshine into darkness. For fifteen minutes or so conversation is reduced to muted tones as everyone stands in awe to admire the beauty. One especially fine occasion - reds, purples, oranges, vermillion, enough to have driven Turner to tears, sticks in my mind. I was sipping of a spectacularly well poured gin and tonic and musing that life was very good indeed, I noticed a pip within the slice of lemon. I wrapped this inside a napkin and took it back home to Devon with me. Two plants germinated from it, slugs ate one, but the other survived and is over six feet tall now. Citrus seldom make good plants grown from seed, growing too vigorously making a thorny tree then fruiting poorly. Nevertheless the leaves have a wonderful peppery lemon fragrance when rubbed in my fingers and the little tree reminds me of blessed times in The Caribbean.

Thank you to the people who give me so much positivity and encouragement for my writing in The Diary; mid-winter cheerfulness and a very happy 2018 to you all.

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