

In my Garden, April.

It was only an 'opless fancy,
It passed like an Ipril dye,
But a look an' a word an' the dreams that they stirred,
They 'ave stolen my 'eart away.

George Orwell, 1984.

Viola labradorica flowers in April, its charming violet flowers are set off perfectly against dark purple leaves. When it is happy it seeds itself around agreeably popping up in paving cracks or its particular favourite, the pots of other plants. Never a nuisance if it grows where it shouldn't, it's easily removed. I haven't ever bought this plant nor potted it either or deliberately planted it, but it has followed me everywhere; to my parents and grandparents' gardens, various employers and here to Dolton too.

In between leaving school and starting my training with the R.H.S. I answered a newspaper advertisement from a lady who dealt in antiques, developed houses, was an accomplished water colour artist and made gardens, for herself and other people too. The first garden she made was at Littleham near Bideford, then after she was widowed, she moved to Dolton, Mrs Lois Garland bought Hilliers, where she changed the name to The Dower House, and laid out a garden there too. I can still see after forty years the skeleton of the garden she created. Her choice of plants and particular style for laying out raised beds. But how she would weep if she could see how poorly the plants had been pruned and managed since her departure. After a few years in Dolton she moved to Sussex where our paths crossed and I gardened with her for nearly 20 years never knowing she lived in Dolton. Very much my mentor, even now her voice is in my head with so many of the garden tasks I do. "Never go anywhere without carrying something". Greatly missed today, however still I grow many of the plants she was generous enough to give me and encourage me in my fledgling horticulture pursuits. In one of the pots of precious plants I was gifted was a plant of *Viola labradorica* Piggy-backing as is its want. I do find religious belief abhorrent, however, I feel very close to dear and absent loved ones by growing the plants from their gardens that they loved and grew themselves. The same is true if I follow a recipe written down by a relative or from one of their cookery books, I strongly feel their presence in the familiar smells and tastes and flavours. The kitchen and the garden are my church.

This year I want to wage war on blackspot, an especially disagreeable rose disease that we are particularly afflicted with in

Devon. I will use a two pronged attack; firstly good culture, making sure the plants are fed with a well balanced fertilizer high in potash and a dressing of lime as roses grow best on alkali soil. Any dead or diseased leaves are scrupulously picked up and burnt, not put on to the compost. And secondly a comprehensive spraying programme. In the past there was a quite dreadful arsenal of poisons available which rose growers casually used often doing more harm than good. I shall use cider vinegar which makes the leaf surface slightly acid, then alternately bi-carbonate of soda to swing the PH sharply to alkaline. This causes difficult extremes of growing conditions for the fungi spores. In addition a good folia feed of seaweed extract to give the plants a boost enabling them to grow as healthily as possible. Some of the plants were so desperately diseased last year I would have happily use asbestos for Chernobyl if I thought it would make a difference!

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