

In My Garden, April

*Write to amuse? What an appalling suggestion!
I write to make people anxious and miserable and to
Worsen their indigestion.*

WINDY COPE

Haven't the primroses done well this year? They seem bigger, bolder and more plentiful than ever before. The 19th of this month is the much forgotten Primrose Day, in memory of Queen Victoria giving a whole wreath of primroses to commemorate the death of Prime Minister Disraeli, primroses were the old queen's favourite flower.

Two years ago I was kindly given a couple plants of what are now being called "walking onions". I always knew them as Egyptian onions before and had wanted to grow them because they are a curiosity. Instead of flowers it produces half a dozen or so bulbils, miniature versions of the larger bulbs that the main shoots are growing from. Most delicious with a more subtle sweeter flavour much more like a shallot rather than a hotter stronger onion taste. They have multiple uses in the kitchen. The young leaves can be chopped and used in salads, sandwiches or mixed in with boiled potatoes, egg fried rice, cheese on toast, the list is endless. The tips of the leaves can be pickled too allowing them to be used in colder months. The swollen bases of the stems can be consumed in any manner of delicious ways, with fish for example, where a taste less harsh than regular onions is required. This most versatile of herb or vegetable only requires well drained soil in a sunny place and will thrive sustainably with none of the constant digging, manuring and replanting the other Alliums require.

Now is the time to start pruning shrubs. Anything that has already flowered can now be pruned. There are a few very easy rules that even the most unknowledgeable gardener could follow. Every year cut out one third of the largest stems right back to where a good strong shoot is growing. That way the shrub maintains a natural shape with flowers covering as much of its growths as possible. Not the horrendously bad rounded mess that is created when ignorant people just skim off all the shoots more often than not with a hedge trimmer inappropriately in late summer. If a shrub flowers before about the beginning of June then prune it directly it has flowered. It means the plant flowers on wood it has produced the previous season. I like to give a scat of fish, blood and bone to help it recover and make good growth over the summertime. If you give it the "annual hedgehog haircut treatment" later on in the year apart from making the shrub a hideous shape you invariably prune away most of the growths that will flower the following year. If it flowers after about the end of June then prune it in the autumn. It means that the plant flowers on wood produced that current season. Basic horticulture.

On numerous occasions I have refused to be compromised to do this type of work for people and have on several occasions been asked to try and rescue and rectify other's sloppy practise. I can never decide whether it is laziness, ignorance or just an uncaring attitude that makes people do this, so appalling. Quite often it is done by "professional" gardeners usually when they've failed at other professions and then decide to take up gardening because they think it is easy, and then have the audacity to charge for this dreadful work! A plant is a living thing, you obviously spend good money on its cultivation by employing a gardener so why not give it some love and respect rather than this butchery.