

## **In My Garden, February.**

*Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*

WINSTON CHURCHILL

It was just over a week ago that I found this single hyacinth when there was a problem with my sewage pump. Planted in a Long Tom clay pot back in October and put in the pump house where it is cool and dark. Pale yellow and blanched when found, it has soon greened up and is now fully in flower. I cannot for the life of me remember if I bought it or if it had been given to me but from the size of the inflorescence and smell, it is a very good cultivar possibly 'Sky Jacket'. The fragrance is incredible you notice it opening the front door even though it's at the other end of the house.

A gorgeous black hellebore is flowering that I pinched as some seeds from the garden of a Rothschild I was working at. During the height of a deep recession money was lavishly spent on the grounds and inside the house. A first class garden designer and a team of 13 ground staff with addition part-time summer help is almost unheard of in modern times. Even here 100 years before the garden team would have been 40, not including boys. The garden was famous for its topiary, the high standard of work and constant grand new projects one of which was the planet topiary. Arranged in the positions of the planets when the owner and his wife were married. Vast steel frame works depicting the symbol of each planet plus the sun and the moon. 22 structures plus 22 base supports each structure alone took at least four men to lift. Inside each was planted a green yew except for the sun was yellow yew and the moon that was silver holly. F.Y.I., the positions were as realistically plotted as far as was humanly possible but the distances between each planet were wildly inaccurate. Allowing for a million miles to represent one centimetre the first four planets are within touching distance from the sun. Pluto however, (when it was still classed as a planet), would be so far away as to be out of sight.

At first I worked in their private garden with a experienced older gardener before being allocated an area of the garden under my own responsibility. The gardens adjacent to the house were planted up as themes; a knot garden, June garden, brown garden, black and white garden, spring garden before terminating in a herb garden at the far side of the house. In the days when good hellebore varieties were often hard to come-by and expensive, seedlings grown especially of a variety like 'Philip Ballard' were worth their weight in gold. In the brown garden the hellebores were superseded by cinnamon and nutmeg coloured Primula 'Spice Shades' that were in turn followed by the unusual lavender/russet

coloured 'Julia's Rose'. Once spring gets underway the hellebores are over and need deadheading, any ripe seed quickly germinates. I chose this particularly dark coloured flower with a good rounded shape after about three years when the plants were mature enough to flower. I kept another that was a fine large wine red.

The resources spent in the garden were a small fraction of what went on inside the house. After five years the yew and holly were just filling their steel frames when the owner and his wife divorced and the whole project was bulldozed flat.

With a few spring-like days it is so tempting to think of winter's passing. Warm sunshine soon brings out bumble bees and Brimstone Yellows and along the lane honey bees fly on missions with great purpose from their home in the hollow bole of a tree, just as well there are masses of snowdrops for them to feed upon. The worst of the winter weather could well possibly be yet to come however this taste of spring is still most welcome. We are naturally optimistic.

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