

A Garden in January

Dinny Pynsent

Our home is in lovely, peaceful countryside, but living on the north side of a hill the garden is shady, cold and wet in winter, and when there is a frost it will often stay all day. The soil is heavy sticky clay which we have tried to improve over the years. Shafts of sunlight do filter through the trees on the hillside but I will often stand outside and look in envy across the valley where the countryside is bathed in sunshine. Consequently the garden is a late one; gardens in the area are often two weeks ahead of ours. However, this year for some reason, perhaps the mild weather, things are different.

On January 12th I walked round the garden (as I do every day) to see what was flowering. A friend had suggested that I should count the numbers of plants that were out as her garden is always ahead of mine. So I did.

Wandering around I expected the winter flowering honeysuckle 'Winter Beauty', *Chimonanthus*, and *Prunus x subhirtella* 'Autumnalis Rosea', but not *Sarcococca*, *Exochorda* or *Viburnum x burwoodii* plus there was *Cornus mas* in bud, with one or two flowers open.

Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill', now happy in its final resting place (having been moved around the garden as if the poor thing was on wheels), flowering and perfuming the air with lovely scent. Bees were still coming to the *Mahonia x media* 'Charity'.

Snowdrops including one flower on *G. 'Godfrey Owen'* (a present from a fellow HPS member) were out far earlier than usual. My treasured patch of Winter Aconites, having finally found a corner where they will flourish, were shining up at me as I wandered past. These came from yet another HPS member's garden.

A couple of flowers of *Leucojum vernum* and *L. aestivum* were nodding their delicate heads and the Hellebores were out in a mix of lovely shades. On the wall outside the kitchen *Cyclamen coum* and *Arabis* were flowering with a nearby pot of blue *Iris reticulata*.

Tucked into a sheltered corner a primrose was in full flower and there were odd flowers on other primulas and polyanthus which were dotted about here and there.

Touches of colour from *Pulmonaria* and other herbaceous plants popped up in several of the beds. In a very shady corner the *Vinca difformis* 'Jenny Pym', which has clambered into a *Physocarpus*, was full of shining lilac stars and lighting up the border.

The list does go on but suffice to say that I have found this winter far more enjoyable than usual with all these early flowering winter gems to admire.