

A happy New Year to everyone, and welcome to your Winter edition of the Hardy Times.

I'm not sure about 'winter' at the moment it feels like a cold monsoon! Everything is dank and dripping, and the ground (in my garden anyway) is so sodden (I'm on clay) that I dare not walk on it. So, I make do with sticking to the paths, rescuing things in pots that were frozen solid only a few weeks ago to see if they've survived, and of course feeding the birds – I love just watching them.

The Echim pininana were covered with heavy duty fleece bags during the freeze last month – the poor things are currently looking decidedly 'leggy' having lost their lower leaves to the freeze, but the growth points are fine... fingers crossed anyway as there's still a fair bit of winter to go yet.

What do we have for you this issue?... Many thanks to all contributors... read on... Ed.

The Delights of Snowdrops

Snowdrops are often thought of as a British native, however they are found all over Europe and were probably brought over here by the Romans. Their formal genus name is 'Galanthus' from ancient Greek meaning Milk flower, and there are many difference species. The common snowdrop we're mostly familiar with is *G. nivalis* (nivalis being Latin for snow-like). It is thought many were brought back from the Crimean war and planted around church entrances in remembrance of lost soldiers. Snowdrops have a strong association with the Feast of Candlemas and used to be called Candlemas Bells. Their early appearance is a sign that winter is here but spring is coming and true 'Galanthophiles' are out in all weathers admiring the little beauties.

One of their delights is that they are considered to be the first flowers of spring and any gardener is happy to get out for the first time in the new year. Having said this, I have snowdrops flowering from late October supposedly through to April with a variety called 'April Fool' (which is a fool, because it blooms in March!).

Snowdrops are quite prolific and are pollinated thanks to bees early in the year. The seeds attract

ants who disperse them, from this, exciting new varieties can be found like 'Blewbury Tart' (right) by Avon Bulbs. Most people expect to see white flowers but research and breeding continues and apricot and pink hues are being developed.



Developing new snowdrops can take up to ten years - hence the cost of some of the newer varieties. Pollen is manually brushed from one set of stamens onto a chosen flower of another. When seeds appear they are collected, sown, grown on, and many discarded as unsuitable. Eventually, and with luck, a desirable bulb will be bulked up using a method called twin scaling (see Upcoming Workshops below). This is a time-consuming process, and so affects the cost of these bulbs.

I have a small garden so the bulbs are grown in aquatic baskets to make sure the different varieties are kept separate. A liquid feed after flowering as the leaves die down is good to help them increase, and congested clumps should be lifted every third or fourth year and split.

Jane Norris

Jane's Snowdrop Open Days

Please come and support **Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance** and have a look at the snowdrops, over 140 named. All the varieties are well labelled and there will be sheets for you to help identify them. There will be a limited amount of bulbs for sale.

Last year quite a few people thought snowdrops were just 'small white flowers'. It was enjoyable showing how different they are... from singles to doubles, flowers with splashes of green, yellow ovaries, fat ones, thin ones... in fact all shapes and sizes. Galanthus have become very fashionable and some are extremely expensive.

Last year the weather was terrible so again this year I am offering plenty of dates.

Dates - February 7th to 9th and 15th to 19th

Times - from 12noon to 4pm.

Address - 10 Ryan Close, Ferndown (off Ameysford Road)

There will be soup, cake and hot drinks. Please park carefully as this is a residential area.

Jane Norris

Upcoming Workshops

*Jane will be holding a few workshops this year, especially for Dorset Hardy Plant members. To express your interest in either of these please email the Group Secretary.

16th March – ‘Propagating Plants for Selling’ – this particular workshop is virtually full, however if you are interested please email the Group Secretary as Jane may do another date for us.

June/July TBA – ‘Propagating Snowdrops using the method of Twin-Scaling’. This method can be used to increase the number of bulbs and ensuring an exact replication of the bulb.

New Year's Day Flower Count

Thank you to everyone who ventured out on New Year's day into their gardens to see what was in flower and dropped us an email with their list. As expected, nowhere near the same number as last year when the highest number was 53. But, well done to Janet in Tolpuddle, and Sue in Dorchester both with a count of 14, who notably had several winter flowering shrubs.

There were a few 'surprising' flowers on your lists: a pale yellow scabious appeared in two gardens (I'd love to know which variety it is); Rosemary and even Armeria (thrift).

On the second (!!) of January, so it doesn't really count - I had two flowers out on my mat forming hardy Osteospermum!!

It just goes to show – as with life – each gardening year is different! Let's hope for more next New Year, perhaps keep this year's list to compare?

Winter Flowering Plants

We all need more winter flowering plants in our gardens to cheer us up on the kind of days we're having a lot of at the moment! But our bumblebees and other early flying insects also need them....read on...

Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill'

Are you a fan of Daphnes? We have a well-established *D. bholua* 'Jacqueline Postill', now around 10-12 years old and about 6' tall. Every year it is covered in

scented pink flowers during January and February, sometimes lasting into March. These



are set off really well by the plant's evergreen foliage. In previous years, the oldest leaves have always begun to fall as flowering comes to an end, making way for fresh foliage in spring. But this winter has been a bit different - by mid-December, after a couple of weeks of very cold weather, some stems of the plant on the less-sheltered side had shed all their leaves and we began to think that our Daphne might be starting to die back as they tend to be short-lived shrubs.

Fortunately, reading Val Bourne's article in the January issue of The Garden has put our minds at rest. She described how her specimen of J Postill loses its leaves every winter in her cold Cotswold garden, but flowering is unaffected. It seems that



the prolonged chill in December affected our plant in the same way. It may have lost a lot of foliage, but is still covered in waxy pink buds (left), growing fatter by the day!

We wouldn't be without J Postill, which has the most delicious scent and attracts lots of early bumblebees. However, if you want to grow a daphne that more reliably keeps its foliage in winter, Val Bourne recommends the similar *D. 'Perfume Princess'*.

Rowena Jecock & Alan Fowler

Ed: 'Jacqueline Postill' has been awarded the RHS AGM and has been long recognised as an excellent variety, and there's a Daphne to suit every garden and every gardener – all sizes and shapes – do check them out and get at least one!

Iris unguicularis

Irises come in many different types and different common names – often confusing, and a subject for another day. But *Iris unguicularis* (*syn stylosa*) is definitely one to include in our gardens for no other reason than being winter/spring flowering and very fragrant!

A rhizomatous perennial clump of low growing evergreen leaves to 30cm. Typical beardless Iris flowers of violet with the falls marked with yellow and white at the base. Varieties available range in colour from the species

to the richer brighter blue/violet of *I. unguicularis* 'Mary Barnard' AGM (right), through to the purple of *I. unguicularis* 'Abington Purple'.



Commonly referred to as the Algerian Iris which gives you an idea of its needs... full sun, drier well-draining, and preferably neutral to alkaline soils. (For those of us on acidic soils treat it hard like lavender, plant it raised on a slight mound with a gritty mix and some garden lime – as per recommended on the packet).

Heather Wyeth

Erysimum (woody wallflower)

Here we're talking about the more woody evergreen type, usually referred to as a 'short lived evergreen perennial'. Our first experience of this type was *Erysimum*

'Bowles Mauve' AGM (right) when it hit our consciousness a few decades ago. It grows quickly and creates a good sized mound of grey/green evergreen leaves, often flowering for



6 months or more starting in January (depending on where you live), with mid-mauve flowers opening on erect racemes.

In more recent years the number of varieties of this type of *Erysimum* has increased – though some seem to be rather similar!

Erysimum 'Red Jep' (right) is slightly shorter than Bowles Mauve and its flowers start off a deep red and fade to a reddish purple. I'm loving this one at the moment.



Then there is *E.* 'Winters Orchid', (left) flowering in my garden now, which seems to keep an equal mix of soft orange/pinky/mauve right from the start of its flowering.

E. 'Parish's', a new variety to me and not yet flowering – probably because I'd tucked it underneath an evergreen for protection during the freeze last month. Its flowers are reported to be shades of deep pink.

It's a Mediterranean plant, so needs full sun, and does best in soil that's on the poorer side, and not too acid (if your soil is rich mix in some grit and sand when planting, if it's acidic add some lime). After two or three years these plants can fade, or become leggy and less attractive so get some new plants going by taking semi-hardwood cuttings.

Heather Wyeth

Perfect Plants for Long-Distance Gardening

We will all have heard the Beth Chatto quote 'Right plant, right place', and we may have noticed that the RHS often tells us how many hours per year a plant should take of our valuable time. These ideas have become especially important to me now that I garden in two plots separated by the English Channel.

Matters came to the fore when during the pandemic my husband and I could not visit France for many months, and it was fascinating to see which plants thrived with neglect, which survived, and which disappeared never to be seen again!

This is a short article about those which did well in a sunny, free draining plot in France. The garden is in the Mayenne, 200 miles due south from my Hampshire garden. The climate is usually colder and drier in the winter and the summers are warmer, with rainfall tending to be spasmodic and heavy.

One of the first borders I planted was with insect friendly plants. A combination of *Echinacea* varieties, *Scabious* – the blue Clive Greaves and the white Miss Wilmott, and *Iris Sibirica*, interspersed with some Gallica roses. Surprisingly, all these did well, the fact they were not cut down in the autumn of 2020 and 2021 seemed to help them through the winter, presumably because the intact stalks protected the crown from winter damp.

Cephalaria gigantea, *Phlomis russeliana* and *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen' as well as being excellent for pollinators through the year have great foliage. This covers the ground, reducing the annual weed burden and keeping the soil moist as the dew runs off the leaves on to the soil. I have discovered that bare soil is my enemy number one when I am not there to hoe or weed on a regular basis.



Loving bright colours I took all my *Kniphofia* collection to France for late summer interest, my favourite being *Kniphofia* 'Nobilis' (syn *Kniphofia uvaria nobilis*) with its huge pokers which look iridescent in the late summer sun.

Hemerocallis were other plants that went to France (pre-Brexit) two doing especially well are Frans Hals (right) and Joan Senior. Again, their foliage helps suppress annual weeds and provides dew runoff.



....*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm' (syn *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm') provides late season colour and food for pollinators, so do the various *Leucathemum* varieties grown near the buildings to compliment the wild 'oxeye' daisies in our area of unmown grass.

Cardoons (*Cynara cardunculus*) grown from seed thrive in the open sunny position and provide a good vertical accent in the garden near the house.

Climbers that have been resilient are the everlasting sweet pea (*Lathyrus latifolius*) who does not seem to mind when she is cut back. I have been experimenting with the Group 3 Clematis, and 'Arabella' does particularly well. If I do not visit until March /April, I just need to remove some of the old stems and give them a less severe prune than I would have done in February.

So, for me, one of the lessons learnt over the last two years is that if I choose plants like those which have done well not only will they be happy, so will I. More colour, less work and a content pollinator population, what more could I want?

Gillian Taylor

Some Truisms to make you smile

- "Gardening - cheaper than therapy (until your spouse adds up the receipts)."
- "Anyone who has time for drama is not gardening enough"
- "Housework is for people who don't know how to garden."
- "Nature: the greatest show on earth and admission is free."
- "You can bury any number of headaches in a garden."
- "I'm not aging, I just need repotting."
- "Remember that children, marriages, and flower gardens reflect the kind of care they get!"
- "Nature's Garden graffiti.... Weeds"
- "Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell and fertilize!"
- "In gardens, beauty is a by-product. The main business is sex and death."
- "Let's have a garden party. Lettuce turnip the beet!"
- "An addiction to gardening is not all bad when you consider all the other choices in life."
- "Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit"
- "Gardener's recipe: one-part soil, two-parts water, three-parts wishful thinking"
- "Gardeners know the best dirt"
- "Always try to grow in your garden some plant or plants out of the ordinary, something your neighbours never attempted. For you can receive no greater flattery than to have a gardener of equal intelligence stand before your plant and ask, 'What is that?'"
- "Despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and his many accomplishments – the gardener owes his existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains."

Gilly Baxter