

Tale from the Garden!

A fresh start ...

Give yourself a little breathing space between the festivities to take stock of your garden & plan some ideas for a brighter, more fruitful year ahead. If you can do it for your garden, how much better you'll feel in hoping for a brighter 2021 in all aspects of our lives, especially after the year we've had.

I love this 'no man's land' between Christmas & New Year. It is the one time in the calendar when I can stocktake – walk round the garden, knowing nothing much is moving. I'm not looking for work when I amble round the plot, I'm looking for gaps – spaces where I can shoehorn in another tree, another shrub, another border plant or a few bulbs.

For instant brilliance & interest, you could seek out that dwarf & hardy carpenter 'Cyclamen Coum' (or Persian Violet), which makes jewel-like ground cover. This cyclamen might look small and dainty but it's a tough, fearless flower & can have a fantastic impact in the winter garden - what a little treasure.



Sparkling in winter and early spring & often seen alongside hellebores, snowdrops and crocus, the dainty but robust flowers come in a wonderful range of colours from deep magenta-pink, through a wide range of softer pinks to pure white and with some irresistible bi-colours. The leathery, kidney-shaped foliage also varies enormously from deep lustrous green to completely silver with many pretty patterns in between.

It originates from countries positioned around the Black Sea, where winters are generally harsh, and starts blooming in December, lasting all the way through to March. Its name, which for once is identical in Latin and English, is transcribed from the Greek word *kuklaminos*, derived from *kuklos*, meaning "circle": it refers to the round and flattened shape of its tuber. It gets its common name "sow-bread" because pigs are said to eat them!

It is a plant of lasting feelings and sincere affection. Thanks to its tuber, which allows it to withstand difficult conditions, the cyclamen is the flower of deep love. In the language of flowers, giving someone a cyclamen expresses love and sincere tenderness. With the stems from its flowers which bend elegantly to lead the fruit toward the ground during its setting (this is the formation of the fruit), the cyclamen symbolised maternal love for our ancestors. This plant was most often given to children and young girls. Did you know that the cyclamen was, with the columbine, one of the flowers of choice for Leonardo Da Vinci at the beginning of the 16th century, and he covered the margins of his manuscripts with it. The 17th century Flemish painters scattered cyclamens on the meadows where Jesus had just picked some flowers under the watchful eye of the angels.

Louis XIV received them in bunches, along with many other flowers, to flower the lounges of Versailles. Jean-Jacques Rousseau spoke in his *Promenades* of the wild cyclamens he discovered in the Alps. After obscurity in the 18th century, the cyclamen came back in fashion in the 19th century, when gardeners cultivated it in Grenelle, near Paris.

Emile Gallé and the artists of the Nancy School made it one of their models for their prints and paintings.

So this is very much the flower of love & the flower of art – but whatever you grow, from me & mine to you & yours, have a happy in-between time! And may the New Year bring us all a fresh start, full of love.