

Taking stock

Jane Allison of Mayfields Plants takes us through her garden in mid winter

Spring seems a very long way off when looking out on a wind-battered garden in early January.

A walk up the borders can be quite dispiriting at first glance, but look harder and all sorts of things have been happening.

The big clumps of silvery *Lychnis* 'Angel's Blush' have doubled in size, with the central plant dying off, and producing a ring of neat seedlings which will provide the new season's white flowers with their characteristic dab of pink in the middle. A circle of *Lunaria* 'Corfu Blue', which I planted too late last year for it to flower, has put on a lot of new growth, thanks to the mild run up to Christmas. Their dark blue flowers will provide a beautiful 'skirt' around the sundial in late June.

All the potentillas have died back to form tight rosettes of new leaves which have gamely survived the first hard frosts. 'Arc-en-Ciel', 'Jean Jabber', 'Monsieur Rouillard' and 'William Rollison' will provide vibrant reds and yellows in various combinations for the front of the border, vying with the geums which have plenty of new green growth curled secretly beneath the old brown leaves. You can't beat geums for early season colour, and I have my favourites! Pale yellow 'Lemon Drops', 'Poco' with its lovely open, deep gold, cupped flowers, and 'Beech House Apricot' which was one of the very first geums I bought to start my stock, and has been showing off its pale apricot flowers ever since.

Monarda 'Gardenview Scarlet', which lies in a rather damp (but not waterlogged) part of the border, has spread out into a low cushion, and will love the extra moisture.

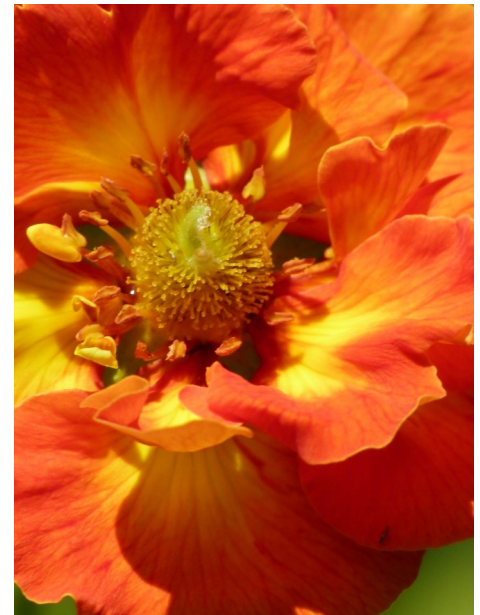
The cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*) has developed a strong basal shoot, and I haven't cut off the seed head yet, as the goldfinches are enjoying the seeds, along with the teasel heads. I have left the small quinces where they have fallen from the *Chaenomeles* 'Geisha Girl', and the blackbirds are steadily demolishing them. This is a great shrub for early colour, with its salmon-pink, neatly cupped petals putting on a very good show up the fence.

In the shady border, I do not expect to see the *astrantias* or *corydalis* for a while yet, but there are plenty of seedlings from the former, which I was careful to avoid when giving the border its last weeding of the season. *Epimedium* x *warleyense* still has plenty of waxy green leaves amongst the brown, and I will be cutting those off next month so that I can see the lovely sunset coloured flowers.

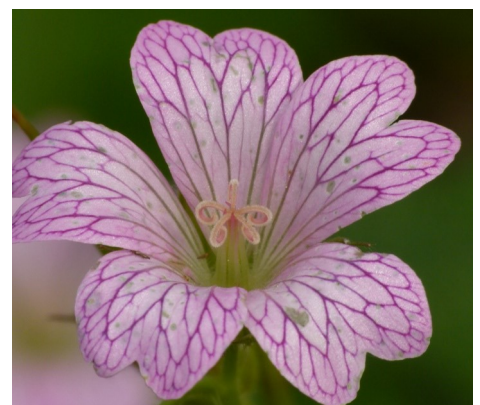
The *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost' has already sent up some fresh new growth under the contorted hazel (*Corylus avellana contorta* 'Red Majesty'), and there is a beautiful display of *Arum italicum* beneath the bare stems of the roses. My favourite geranium *Geranium oxonianum* 'Lace Time' has produced quite a lot of new growth, after being cut back very hard in October, and, as usual, hasn't been worried by the frosts. Growing beneath three vigorous roses, and a high fence, this will produce its perfectly shaped mounds of fresh green foliage and plenty of white, delicately laced with pink, flowers from spring onwards.

I planted lots of foxgloves here in September, and they have produced some strong clumps in readiness for bursting into a glorious display of apricots, whites, lilacs and yellows in June and July. 'Sugar Plum', 'Snow Thimble', 'Pam's Choice', 'Apricot Delight' 'Speckled Spires' to name just a few of them. Right against the fence is *D. ferruginous gigantea*, which will shoot up to 5' like an exclamation mark. This will be one of the most bee-visited parts of my garden.

My asters performed well last season, particularly 'Alma Potsche', which attracted lots of late-arriving Red Admiral butterflies in September. A closer look reveals plenty of strong basal growth.



"Potentillas will provide vibrant reds and yellows".



"'Lace Time' has produced new growth, after being cut back hard".

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So: not as dispiriting as it first appeared! The one concern, of course, is that the early new growth will be blasted by a series of hard frosts, so we must all cross our fingers. However, I deliberately grow very hardy perennials for sale: no-one wants to invest in a 'whimp'!

I will be at many of the Plant Hunters Fairs' lovely venues this coming season, and the majority of the above mentioned herbaceous perennials will be available on my tables, together with lots of other 'goodies'.

I have a new talk in preparation, which garden societies can book this year for their 2016 programmes. During this year I will be going on a number of country walks, and will be photographing the flowers of rivers and stream sides, meadows, woodlands, ancient churchyards and rural cottage gardens. A little bit of 'old England' in fact! Please have a look at the Talks section on my website.



"*Digitalis ferruginea gigantea*, will shoot up 5' like an exclamation mark".

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