

Allotment and Gardening Jottings

Dilly's Diary

Late autumn-winter proved to be benign in comparison with the previous year's snowy and icy conditions, although things could have changed by the time this appears! Hopefully, attention will soon be turning towards spring sowing, planting and digging.

13 Nov: Glorious afternoon spent at Batsford arboretum, where, despite being so late in the year it is warm enough to enjoy tea outdoors following walks among the trees, bronzed leaves underfoot, and some late blooms and interesting berries. Also manage to find a small pack of garlic bulbs in the shop, which in past years have already been planted by late October: the delay this time may be appropriate given the mild autumn.



14 Dec: Finally find time to pot up the paperwhite narcissi for which several clay pots have been nestling by the back door for weeks. The bulbs, placed overnight in shallow water to spur the roots, quickly sported green shoots. Even so, it was over-optimistic to expect them to be in flower for Christmas (they weren't!) On the patio table a lovely white cyclamen acquired in early November is blooming. This one apparently loves the outdoor life.

Splashes of Colour

15 Nov: Take the opportunity of more fine weather for brief visit to plot to prepare ground and plant out garlic and a few winter onion sets. In the herb bed, rosemary is flowering mauve-blue and has put up lots of new shooting stems, shining bright green.

19 Nov: Remove tomato plants from their pots at bottom of garden, salvaging trusses which are still sporting green fruits, tying them in bunches to hang in kitchen window.

December: A fallow month for activity at the plot despite the relatively favourable conditions for digging - will have to make up for lost time in the new year! There are still leeks, a few assorted brassicas and herbs to harvest as needed. At home, it is early in the month before outdoor patio pots of pelargoniums are relocated to improvised sites around the house where they continue to flower giving unseasonal splashes of colour.

'Joi Choi'

20 Dec: Use most of remaining small outdoor tomatoes, which have ripened in kitchen window, in a stew, reserving a few for inclusion (along with the rest of the pot-grown fennel) in a pasta sauce.

28 Dec: Spend some time investigating seed order which was received in second half of November. First item from the brown paper package is a note to say one of the numbers given on the order form could not be identified: naturally am unable to locate the seed catalogue or my list! Among the vegetables to be newly tried this coming season are *Barlotta* climbing beans, which have pinkish stripes on green pods; *Carouby* peas, which sport purple flowers and long, flat 'mange tout' pods, and a variety of oriental *Pak Choi* gloriously named '*Joi Choi*'. On the salad front, am returning to a traditional lettuce variety, "*Webb's Wonderful*" after hit and miss results last season with various 'mixed leaf' types.

Dilly Marigold.