

The bottom of the garden

Today was sunny and warm, like they promised the weekend would be, and I have been clearing up the bottom of the garden during the hottest part of the day. There is an avenue of trees that runs along the adjacent property, they are not in full leaf yet, but there is enough that I was working in dappled shade. There is a pieris japonica at the bottom of the garden, they enjoy the shade.

I am not sure which one it is, it was the missus that chose it and planted it so it is probably a particular cultivar she has chosen. She tends to grow the ornamentals, I grow the fruit and veg., though it is not a hard and fast rule. The other thing in which we vary is that she tends to buy plants from garden centres, I am more inclined to go for the plants I get for free.

When we first moved here there was a lot of work to be done on the house, in fact we replaced all the ceilings, built a kitchen extension, put in a bathroom and re-plastered extensively before we even moved here. There was not a lot of time for the garden that year, and it was in a horrible state, knee deep in the most pernicious sorts of weeds, I ran a mower over it and then went all over it with a rotovator, about the only thing left standing was an old apple tree up the top end, then I sowed grass all over and the next year simply mowed it and established a compost heap.

That dealt with a lot of the weeds, and by that time we had moved in and decorated, laid carpets, varnished floors, put up coat pegs and a few of the other thousand and one little jobs that make an empty house a home. Meanwhile all the bulbs that I had found when rotovating had been moved to the bottom of the garden and had grown and naturalised in the grass. Most were various types of daffodil, and are still there, they supply huge numbers of cut flowers for the house early in the year and smell wonderful, but among them were a few bluebells. These I transplanted around the bottom of the pieris when we got it, and their blue flowers contrast nicely with its young, red leafed shoots. In front of them I have cultivated three or four feet forward and there I planted the few snow drops that came up among the bulbs, alongside them are cyclamen.

The first two cyclamen I found dried out and chucked in a skip with a lot of household rubbish, but I have added to them since. People get given them as pot plants in full bloom, often in mid-winter, and then abandon them when they stop flowering. There is usually a decent size corm, and they survive being planted out well. They make a good show, all colours from white to shocking cerise and scarlet and vermillion, starting in winter and going through to April, and they have interesting and varied foliage.

My treat for them is to gather all the dead leaves each autumn and stuff them into plastic sacks, these I stash behind the pieris out of sight, then when I weed the cyclamen bed I cover it all over in an inch or two of the leaf mould the contents of the sack has rotted down into, lifting the leaves of the plant to brush it underneath, if they are in leaf. They love it. Their natural

habitat is deciduous Mediterranean woodland, where they flourish during the Winter when the trees are bare, then settle down, dormant in their corms, for the hot dry Summer, that is why people think they have died and throw them out, my stock is increasing.