

Take a Walk ...in your garden

With weeks devoted to celebrating one group or another, i.e. 'Walk your lobster on a leash week', I would suggest that this week, the first week of March, be 'Garden Wonder Week'. This is the pre-spring time when gardeners go out and wander about wondering if it is too late to take cuttings from the rosemary, too early to coax flowering quince into bloom, and wonder why the stems of the small widow iris are nearly a foot tall but no bloom stems visible and several leaves in the clump eaten to nubs.

They wonder, too, why some critter is eating *Acuba* leaves that never before had culinary appeal. This gardener wonders what is the name of the wildflower with the single ovate green leaf with the maroon satiny reverse? It looks so alive amid the dead leaves in a wooded area. Does it produce a small summertime orchid perhaps? The name will eventually come to me, next week, in the middle of the night.

About the iris: it isn't an iris, a mere relative, *Hermodactylus tuberosus* and it is also called snake's head iris and can be found in Brent & Becky's Bulbs catalog. If it doesn't bloom, it may be because the spot, near a mostly dead oak tree is too acid. I also wonder about the small azaleas that appear to be dead. They may be reacting to the hot dry summer and cold winter. I won't replace them as a nearby beech doesn't make it easy for them to compete with the tree's shallow fibrous roots.

The expected blooms on shrubs and trees is late this year but the daffodils, bless them, behave like the good soldiers they are, arrive on time. The *Prunus mume* that has bloomed as early as late December/early January shows red buds but no open blooms and don't we usually see the tiny folded umbrellas of Mayapple pushing through by now? This eagerness to pull spring in ahead of schedule may be a reaction to the unusually cold winter. We seem to be in the grip of our expectations, unwilling to let the small miracles unfold slowly. Have even gardeners succumbed to the rampant malady of instant gratification?

P.S. The single leaf mentioned above is the Cranefly orchid, *Tipularia discolor*. It has a small midsummer bloom.

THE KINDEST CUT: If you have had a recent birthday, or have been given a bouquet just for the delight of it, the advice has changed. We once thought that the florist had added magic to the water and we were not to disturb it. Now we are told to change the water every day. If you do not wish to disrupt the structure of the arrangement place it in the sink and let fresh water overflow the vase until you think it has all been replaced.

If you have been given a bouquet in a box, we are now told to cut the stems underwater, in a bowl of tepid water, and let them 'rest' for hours or overnight before arranging them. In May and June when everything is bursting at once you may be excused for picking, enjoying, composting and picking again.

Another expert has told me to change the water every other day adding 2 tablespoons of lemon juice, 1 tablespoon of sugar and ½ teaspoon of bleach to a quart of water. Hmm. Some arrangers add an aspirin, non-coated I presume, to the water. On the other hand, some of us, rather than bring the flowers inside, take a cup of tea and join them outside. We watch sunlight dance off their colors and study the flurry of insects they attract.

ABOUT CATALOGS: I keep mine in a 5” deep basket and when the stack reaches to a foot and slithers across the carpet it is time to winnow. In the sorting and tossing process you notice the trends that evolve over the years. This year you know vegetables have achieved social acceptance when the White Flower Farm catalog offers over 100 varieties of tomatoes including several heirloom plants. The catalog actually has an heirloom apple, ‘Esopus Spitzenburg’. (love that name, a village and a person)

Another sign of our new times is the old-fashioned push mower in the Spring 2011 Gardener’s Supply Co. catalog. This employee-owned company always has clever ways to play in the dirt and feed your family, but a push mower? Actually the price is not old-fashioned but it has been re-engineered to be smart and labor saving. I vividly remember using the old model so I am pleased it is improved. In an ideal world lawns would shrink to a size not requiring riding mowers. Not that we haven’t laughed at seeing riding mowers being manipulated on a pocket-sized lawn, which proves that riding mowers may not be Daytona but they are great fun!