

## The Garden moves Onwards into Spring

Winter flowering shrubs have continued to brighten the dark days of late winter, even throughout the rigours of the weather. As the days lengthen, we begin to find floral delights at ground level.

Amongst the usual plantings of winter heathers, polyanthus and violas, the first **snowdrops** emerging (often in early January) are a promise of things to come. This is the season for the Galanthophiles (snowdrop lovers), visiting gardens to view collections of the hundreds of different varieties now available (if you have a well-stuffed wallet!)

This is one of the more common of them, called 'Trumps'.



An unusual find in the winter garden is **the iris unguicularis**. It can flower throughout winter but is more prolific in February/March.

A patch of **crocuses** brings a reliably colourful sight.



**Spring Snowflakes**, *Leucojum vernum*, at first glance may seem to be another group of Snowdrops, but the detail is quite distinct and very dainty. They generally follow on from the snowdrops.

One of the next to shine in the garden is **Ipheion** 'Alberto Costillo'. These bulbs are not easily grown, but this group is happily multiplying in a raised planter in part shade. They make a cheerful sight.

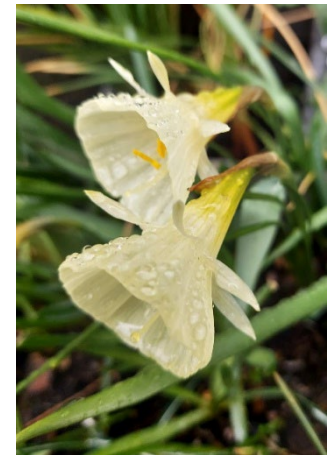


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More commonly known are the wonderful **varieties of Hellebores**. The Christmas rose, *Helleborus niger* flowers from mid-winter to early spring but tends to be ground-hugging. *Helleborus hybridus* is more attention seeking and admired in the garden. It is known for self-seeding and providing lots of young plants to give away. They come in a range of colours, mainly cream through yellow, pinks, purple to almost black. This cultivar is holding its flower upright, showing the intricate markings.

Moving onwards through the sequence of spring bulbs come **the Narcissi**. Small varieties are often earliest, but the display of different types can continue into May. The picture is of *Narcissus bulbocodium*, which is quite different to the usual form of daffodil.



By the spring equinox, around March 20<sup>th</sup>, the garden will be waiting to bring on the parade of spring flowering shrubs. Timings of events in the garden are always weather dependant, but last year it was noticeable that several of these were just beginning to open at that date, overlapping with the last of the winter-flowering shrubs. In the picture *Magnolia stellata* is shown opening white buds whilst the winter honeysuckle beyond is still hanging onto its last flowers.

**Enjoy your garden and the uplifting signs of spring.**