

In My Garden, January.

I sing the circle of my country's year, I sing the tillage, and reaping, sing classic monotony, that modes and wars leave unsisturbed, unbettered, for their best was born immediate of expectancy
V. SACKVILLE-WEST

Autumn; one of the weather prophets' silliest of silly seasons for tiresome predictions. Very occasionally folklore has some vague pip of accuracy at its core, two inane debunkable sayings are rubbish: "*Lots of berries mean a hard winter*" merely demonstrates there was a good fruiting season, and "*if plenty of berries remain by Christmas, they're being saved because cold weather is to come*". Idiomatic codswallop. Simply, either the weather is mild with an abundance of food or they are yet to ripen. If anyone consistently guessed a season's weather they would be the richest person alive. Juggling chaos theory and a myriad of variables meteorologists struggle with their vast resources of computation for a week ahead, sometimes just 24 hours, what possible chance is there for a few months time? I only believe, "Prepare for the worst but hope for the best", our weather's singular constant is unpredictability, there are too many irregularities for soothsayers' boring chattering to make a long term prophecy credible.

Often we receive a succession of deep low pressures like mighty spiders' webs hurtling across the Atlantic crashing upon us. These tempests bring mild weather too, often tropical air, even in the deep mid-winter springtime manifests itself everywhere you look.

Mild wet warm soil creates perfect conditions for moving plants. Positioned wrongly is *Rosa serica* subsp. *Omeiensis* forma. *Pteracantha* var. "Redwings", the only rose grown primarily for its pretty prickles. For a few weeks in the summer the new growths bear glowing red thorns two inches wide and a whole inch high. Even when planted so the sun back-lights their beautiful translucence this ephemeral splendour hardly compensates. All too soon they age to unattractive greyish-brown, the rose for the majority of its existence looking like an aggressive stegosaurus, its too near the house to be this unbeautiful. Its replacement is plain *Rosa serica* grown by a local Agapanthus specialist from wild seed collected personally in the Himalayas. Plants can have an enhanced interest because of their provenance rather than generic shrubs picked up in a garden centre, banalities churned out as they coin it in. with attractive delicate foliage and pointy pairs of tiny thorns by far the most important detail are the flowers; pure white and the only briar with four petals instead of five, followed by eye-catching elongated hips.

Whenever the soil is too saturated to work I take the opportunity to do proper formative tree and shrub pruning. Unencumbered by leaves, without those summer pressures of constant grass cutting, weeding and watering the task is more straightforward. This allows time to do a vitally important job with the correct care it deserves. Otherwise ignorant or tardy gardeners all too frequently panic, sieze the hedge cutter in late summer carelessly making everything into hideous bun shapes. As if *that* wasn't bad enough they then forever receive an annual "hedgehog hair-treatment".

A lemon tree, taken inside during July due to frost, got put back out in December, is flowering now because it was so warm. A balmy 14.2° night-time low, recorded at Chivenor! Its killing my neighbour's bees! 2014 was officially the warmest ever recorded, with another ten warmest years occurring already *this* century. Every year seems to make new records for unprecedented meteorological events. It appears we must brace ourselves for future extremes. IT'S WINTER F.F.S! the garden should sleep; eradicate those dregs of summer, thwart springtime in December and hope what's left of the season turns bark-splittingly cold!