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mighty galanthus

Posted in All posts on 17th January 2013

First of all, a very happy 2013 to all readers of Garlic and Sapphire! I hope this year brings health and happiness, and lots of gardening adventures to you. Unless you are a very experienced gardener who has managed to plant specifically and successfully for winter interest, (I want to be that gardener, I do, shall we start with sweet scented Christmas Boxus, and striking red Dogwoods?), then your garden, like mine, may be largely fifty shades of quagmire right now.

But at this time of year, there are tiny harbingers of hope, small in stature, easily missed but mighty in their power to bring a big grin to the face of flower-lovers in the middle of winter. Snowdrops, so tiny but so very very welcome! They are just now poking their heads through the frosty leaves and mud in my little woodland area of the garden, like little pioneers of promise.

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Despite the freezing temperatures this time of year, it won't be long until they form little carpets of white and green, proving beyond doubt that life is indeed teeming underneath the barren looking soil.





The snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis* the best known of the Galanthus genus, growing to about 25cm and flowering between January and March. It is native to large areas of Europe and probably brought over here in the sixteenth century. It is now widely naturalised, and fantastic displays can be seen across the country.

If you want to see some spectacular examples of their ability to carpet woodland gardens, there are gardens open to the public that will take your breath away. Cambo Estate, Benington Lordship, Bank Hall, Hodsock Priory (12 acres of snowdrops), and Dunham Massey (over 100,000 snowdrops!), are just a few. Many more private gardens open for visitors via the National Garden Scheme – check their website to see which.

Although they are small flowers, planted en masse, snowdrops can look so beautiful, especially exciting in the depths of winter. They are best bought and planted “in the green” – just after they have finished flowering. Unless you are in the grip of galanthomania, (and plenty are!), it can be quite difficult to tell the subtle differences between the varieties, but I do love *Galanthus elwesii* for its elegance and gentle honey scent. *Galanthus nivalis* ‘Margery Fish’ has rather smart and distinctive green stripes on its outer petals and *Galanthus* S. Arnott is a bit bigger and chunkier if you want a bit more floral bang for your buck.

All will gradually naturalise and spread, particularly if they are planted in favourable conditions – dappled shade with a rich enough soil to avoid drying out in the summer. I want to try growing them as ground cover under bright red dogwoods, but they also look so pretty simply planted at the feet of trees and shrubs. They are certainly one of my most eagerly anticipated flowers of the year, and they make me believe again that there will be colour and beauty in my garden however bare it is looking elsewhere. I would love them for that alone.



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