Walking through Beth Chatto’s gardens the other week I was in search of colour, something which said ‘Indian Summer’. There was plenty of it around. On the edge of the woodland garden however there was something a bit Christmassy under a tree.

Cyclamen hederifolium is the smaller, wilder version of the indoor flowers you see in mid-winter, the pink/white alternative to a poinsettia. It’s best to avoid making a mental association between the two as it spoils things rather. Along with cyclamen coum, which flowers in spring, the hardies are arguably much prettier than the softies and they have every right to flower when they want to.
A good place to grow wild cyclamen is somewhere out of the way, in a place that is not pampered. Last spring at Cottesbrooke Hall, where I was under-gardening for a year, we cleared out the herbaceous borders of the Pool Garden. An enclosed garden which was designed in the 1950s, the flowerbeds were full of carpets: a rug of violets, a shag pile of geranium, a neat round mat of cyclamen. All of this was on the march towards the Wild Garden, where they could spread around, all natural-like.

Cyclamen hederifolium has a corm which people also call a bulb or a tuber. Old corms like the ones in the Pool Garden look like space ships with spirally tentacles. When nestled under the roots of a tree a cyclamen corm is not easy to dig out intact. Try not to have a complete tantrum, and go in carefully.
When autumn cyclamen is in bloom the pollinated flowers droop down and the stems spiral down into the ground. In spring the seed head, which rests at ground level, becomes very sticky and ants and other insects take the seeds to more far flung places. Growing cyclamen from seed is a tricky business and the obvious thing to do is to buy cyclamen in pots (which of course you can at Sarah Raven) and plant them out. Try to place the pots where an ant would...