

Garden Ramblings

Supposedly, March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. The alteration in our weather patterns might have confused past gardeners. I am of a generation where it does. I wonder what animals will appear this year. Llamas seem a good idea as they seem, from a distance, to be fairly docile and maybe are known for writing poetry.

There is still plenty of time to sort out herbaceous plants by lifting them and dividing and replanting them. Anything that looks old and woody can be cut off so you plant sturdy looking newer bits of plants. I do try to colour coordinate or have plants of similar height together but I do love the element of surprise having tall plants in what seems to be in odd places. It is sometimes by mistake. I worked on a small raised bed in the front which was built for my mother. It's been a delight working at a good height. There were 3 barrows of unidentified gnarled roots which found themselves on a "grow or don't " bank.

I rather like the plantings of Gertrude Jekyll 1838-1932. She lived in the time of the Arts and Crafts movement - think William Morris. She was an extremely good artist but her sight began to fail and she realised that by working with plants, she could produce gardens with swathes of colour and texture that was so different from massed carpet bedding. Carpet bedding is very formal and took the parterre gardens to a new height or low depending on your point of view. It was and is much loved by "corporation" type gardens and was named after oriental carpets with geometric patterns.

Gertrude did a lot of gardens with the architect Lutyens. In fact they worked on over 100 properties in Britain, 400 world wide. She had the plans of the area sent to her and worked at home. Her flowing planting plans really helped to soften the design of the building and joined everything together. She is remembered for her beautiful white gardens. There is a garden I visited ages ago in north Norfolk in what was then a religious retreat or hostel. I had afternoon tea there. Another near is at Letchworth Park in Herts where the herb garden is her work and Lutyens designed the whole garden for his sister who lived there.

Another snippet is that Gertrude's brother, Walter was a friend of Robert Lewis Stephenson who wrote about Jekyll and Hyde. No prizes for where one name came from.

Small gardeners might like to try growing alfalfa rather than the inevitable cress. You just need a saucer, folded up kitchen roll kept damp and a good covering of alfalfa seeds. Cut when about a thumb height and see what colour the kitchen roll is and perhaps why. It is tasty in salads but best just cut and gobbled up. One packet does loads of saucers full. Grow some in a little pot of soil in a sunny place to see what they look like when bigger. PS cut plant not thumb.