



THE GARDEN

Last year we noticed that the small box-enclosed lawn in our front garden had become covered in moss. Moss is used to great effect in Japanese gardens, and looks very pretty on some of the trees in Wilderness Wood. But not in our lawn. We raked. And raked. And raked. We shifted barrow loads of the stuff. We could have supplied a small garden centre with enough moss to fill all their hanging baskets. That was last year.

This year, we could have done it all again. Obviously raking the stuff had stimulated its growth hormones. Ahah, thought the moss. They're clearing the way for us to expand even further. Geronimo!

So we got a large piece of weedmat, and covered it with shingle. Shingle comes in two types. There's the stuff that comes from inland, and is brownish in colour. Most comes from coastal areas, and is pale whitish-grey. That's where ours came from. At first, we thought it was too white, and since there wasn't quite enough to cover the whole area thought we'd add some of the brown shingle on top. But after living with it for a few days the contrast between it and the sculpture and box grew on us, so we decided to add more coastal shingle instead. Goodbye moss. And no more mowing.

As we replan the garden to reduce the work and with fewer flowers beds, the vegetable garden has become a major part of what we now do. April is one of the busiest months for sowing vegetables, and by now is bursting with baby seedlings, ready to put out when space becomes available or the weather is suitable. Last year I sowed peas at different times to give us a succession, but the later sowings gave us pathetically meagre pickings compared to the first crops. So this year they'll all be planted this month and early next. If we get too many at once the surplus will go in the freezer.

I'm sure everybody knows not to cut off or tie up the leaves of daffodils when they've finished flowering. Advice we used to get from the garden gurus back in the days when a tidy weed/insect free garden was what we all had to strive for, only possible with a shedful of chemicals - some people even poisoned worms because they thought their casts spoiled the lawn! Now that we still appear to be on a relentless quest to wipe out most of the non-human species on the planet, the countryside a chemically altered wildlife desert, our gardens are the last refuge for the creatures we depend on to sustain life, including our own. So maybe we could be a little less pernickety and manage our gardens in ways that allow the bugs and beasties a safe haven. We could make a start by turning our backs on trying to achieve a 'bowling green' lawn. It may be a challenge for some, but it's as arid for wildlife as concrete. Allow the grass to grow a few millimetres higher and it will be teeming with invertebrates, food for birds. Most of them don't bite.

The star performers in our garden this month are the ornamental onions - the Alliums. Planted en masse, they've always been the May show-stoppers. As a bonus, they come back year after year and the dried seed heads are good for flower arrangements.

Now for a few jobs. Clip evergreen hedges. Prune Clematis Montana once it's finished flowering. It can be cut back hard if necessary. Tie climbing roses horizontally to encourage flowering. Leave the last 15cm/ 6" untied which will grow more quickly and stronger, to be tied later (thanks Monty Don and Gardener's World). Pile on as much mulch on the beds as you can lay your hands on.

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