

# Stratford sub Castle Garden Club - Cuttings from Dorothy's Garden

## 1. Dorothy's Challenge - September 2020

.....so, you're not a gardener?

**Here is a dare!**

Outdoor spaces have turned to treasure in lockdown so let's make yours, (if you are lucky enough to have one), somewhere to make you smile with pleasure and pride, especially when some rare insect gets its lunch in your garden because of what you have done.

First though, a confession, so that you know where you stand with this. In the week leading up to lockdown, our excursion, three days running, was to the local Garden Centre. We purchased and filled the boot with bags of manure and compost – as much as the car could carry. Unloading it and storing it was our keep fit for the day. You see, I must not run out of the right stuff, I just have to keep gardening. Come Saturday, with two days to go, when we got there, the shelves were empty at Tesco. Still, you have to get your priorities right.

**Here is your challenge! It can't go wrong and you may love it. The worst that can happen is that you let some new weeds grow.**

Choose a spot in your garden that is visible from a window that you pass often. Mark out, with sticks, stones, rope, whatever, an area about 1.5 metres x 1.5metres and start to clear it. This can mean different things. If it is turf, skim off thin layers, leave the soil behind and stack the turf in a tower, grass side down, out of sight somewhere and by next year this will be lovely nutritious soil if you managed to keep light out and let water in. If the area is scrub, bushes, brambles and weeds, dig them out, especially the roots. Make the edges neat by slicing vertically, whether this area is curvy or angular. You may as well look professional from the start.

Next you need pencil and paper and here is your shopping list. If you go to a garden centre without one you will either spend a fortune on luscious things that won't last or you will come out with nothing as there is so much to choose from. I shall tell you how to fill your 'plot' so that you have flowers and interest from January to mid - June and then go to the garden centre and buy a few colourful splashes to fill the spaces until October. These are transient but the rest will come back bigger and better each year. (Except for the tulips which do sometimes sulk if you are unlucky.)

Here is what to buy:

- 1) A Hellebore. An evergreen plant. Choose one with pink or cream flowers. Mine flowered from January to April this year.
- 2) One packet of daffodils called 'Tete a Tete'. Flower Feb – March.
- 3) One packet of taller daffodils that flower March – April. It tells you on the label.
- 4) One packet of tulips that flower April – May.
- 5) A golden conifer, bushy or flame shaped that says 'height in 10 years, 2/3 feet or less that a metre.

Next, phone me, 01722 321431 and I will give you two of the most reliable, trouble free plants that will be in flower on 1st June for three weeks:

One is Geranium 'Magnificum' . This, during May, will form a gorgeous dome of leaves with interesting shape and texture. And then, blue saucer shaped flowers about 2/3 cm across will emerge. This is a user friendly plant – it doesn't get tall and then collapse or cave outwards, it doesn't spread over other plants and it must taste disgusting as none of the garden pests attack it. It will stand there until the frost gets it in November and then you just tidy up the dead leaves ready to start all over again.

The other plant is called Campanula persicifolia 'Alba'. This is evergreen and forms a little mat on the soil, perfect for insects' winter protection and it prevents weeds growing. In May /June it sends up spires about 50/60 cm high covered in white cup shaped flowers that look slightly luminous at dusk on warm summer evening.

Now you are beginning to see the reason for the little golden conifer as you have a gold, purple and white combination – lovely. But, there is a better reason. In Nov/Dec, when the weather is miserable, your plot will be marked out by the bushy green hellebore, the golden conifer and the green Campanula mat. These three evergreens give what gardeners (that is you now) call, winter structure.

Anything that you buy in June/July for a bit of transient exotic colour can be planted over the daffodils as they will have died back. The bulbs should be well down in the ground, so just plant on top of them.

This is a good forward planning thing to get going with as we protect ourselves from Covid. If it doesn't work for you, there is still the plus that you have done some gentle keep fit in the garden and got the neighbours wondering what you are up to.

**There are no Garden Club meetings in the next few months and we will review the situation in November to see if we can recommence in January. Good luck if you take up the challenge and I look forward to hearing from you.** By the way, my gardening friends could give you a totally different set of ideas that work just as well. I have this combination of plants growing in my garden so I know it looks good.

When Garden club gets going again, do come. The less you know about gardening the bigger the value of each meeting and we are an enthusiastic bunch.

**Dorothy Richards**