

Some stars for your spring garden

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Not until the snowdrop escapes the winter blues does the promise of spring become reality. Those tiny little nodding *Galanthus* lure even the most confirmed armchair gardeners back out into the fresh air.

Once outside, the beauty of the awakening spring garden is revealed. I'm always amazed at just how vibrant the Cyclamen coum is. From humble beginnings this little ground-hugging, tuberous plant becomes a great swath of colour beneath deciduous trees. As long as they like their habitat they self-seed, adding to the rich tapestry of the spring garden. And if you really want to spread the colour around you can collect the seeds in July and disperse them yourself.

Hellebores are among the hardest working of the spring flowering plants. They flower from the middle of January right up to early summer. They are the perfect woodland plant surviving under shade but doing equally well in full sun.

Hellebores need very little attention especially if they are semi wild but in the cultivated garden you might like to tidy them up by pruning off the previous year's leaves just as the new ones emerge around the beginning of January.

The flowers come in a fantastic range of colours and can be either single or double.

The only drawback with hellebore is that they tend to seed profusely all around themselves which isn't as much of a problem in a natural or wild garden as it is in a cultivated one.



Primroses are definitely a must-have plant, in any spring garden, from the native *Primula vulgaris* to the more robust and showy drumstick primrose *Primula denticulate*.

If you have a water source *Candelabra primula* are a great addition because of their ability to thrive along the edges of rivers and ponds, growing in the form of colourful tiered flower spikes.

Primroses, as a rule, tend to prefer life along ditches and forest floors so if you replicate these ideal conditions you will succeed in naturalising them in your garden. Some of the new double flowered varieties are quite stunning and are a great addition to pots and window boxes if your garden space is limited.

When I was a child the cowslip was in abundance in the fields around and about but not so much now unfortunately. Although their seed is finding favour again in some of the better known wildflower mixes.

To finish, it might be interesting to have a look at a rarity and none better than *Lathraea clandestina* which will certainly cause you to stop in your tracks when you see it for the first time.

A haze of purple jewels at the base of a wounded willow looks, for all the world, like a magnificent crocus but they are a parasitic plant that grow on the roots of many trees especially willows, without causing them any noticeable harm,... the best kept secret in a spring garden.