

Counting flowers on Christmas day *Judy Summers*

Christmas Day 2012, and it began very wet but mild. I went for a long, squelchy walk this morning across the fields with a friend's dog in tow. Half way across the muddy field it stopped and refused to move. Can't say I blamed it, but I did curse when I had to carry it to the road! Once again on a solid surface it resumed its normal curiosity for everything.

This afternoon the rain ceased, so I donned coat and hat to see what was flowering in the garden. As I walked out of my back door I came face to face with what I call the spring bed. It is so choc-full of spring bulbs I daren't put fork nor trowel in it for fear of spearing some treasure. It is shaded by a *Prunus autumnalis*, the one with the pink flowers. Into the tree grows a white jasmine - a bit of a thug, reaching right to the topmost branches of the cherry. This autumn found me up the ladder, eyes full of dust and debris as I tried to thin it out a bit. A couple of years back I planted *Clematis* 'Freckles' to accompany the jasmine. Today it gives me great delight, looking up into the dainty greeny yellow bells with the dark red flecks inside - just looks as though someone has spray painted it.

Down by my feet, next to the house wall, is a huge clump of *Iris unguicularis* with wonderful pale purple flowers. I don't know its name. It was already in the garden when I moved here nine years ago. Many a piece has been passed on to friends or transferred to other spots in the garden.

Moving clockwise round the house, my eyes are drawn to a small clump of special snowdrops which have been in flower for two weeks. I know they are special because I was given them from the 'expensive section' of the plant sale table at The East Anglian garden group in exchange for a crate of flower pots - funny, isn't it, what memories a particular plant can conjure up?

Walking by the shady bed where primroses abound and seed everywhere, there aren't just one or two in flower, but clumps of them - rosettes of crinkly green leaves with the palest yellow flowers, each petal with a streak of egg-yolk yellow at the base and the tiniest spot of green in the middle to complete the picture.

In a very sheltered position I'm surprised to see a clump of *Erigeron karvinskianus* still in bloom. The others are long exhausted. What amazes me about this little daisy is that it always seems to seed itself in just the right place and it flowers its socks off all summer long. I wouldn't be without it.

Lighting up the fence with its sunshine yellow stars is *Jasminum nudiflorum*. It came from a tiny piece pulled up out of my last garden nine years ago and has flourished. Not far from the jasmine is a *Viburnum bodnantense*. I have read that it perfumes the air round and about, but not for me it doesn't! I have to press my nose close up to pick up the scent. I must be losing my sense of smell as I grow older. Its perfume takes me back to my childhood and a certain talcum powder my mother used.

Down at the bottom of the garden is a white flowered *Prunus autumnalis*. The old pink-flowered tree bears nothing at present and even when it does flower the blossom is sparse, but the white version is awash with tiny stars of almost double flowers. I planted it only five years ago - imagine what a display it will make when it matures. I'll be able to admire it from my kitchen window.

I can't believe it, I have just counted three different geraniums in flower! Admittedly they aren't the most wonderful blooms but blooms they are; two pink ones, the other a magenta *Geranium sanguineum*. Not far along the border I spot two flowers of potentilla, again rather bedraggled but you can definitely see one is red and the other yellow. I was under the illusion that I had cut their heads off earlier in the season, thrown them on the compost heap and put an end to them for the winter - apparently they had other ideas. My final find this Christmas day were the flowers on that good old stalwart, *Viburnum tinus* 'Eve Price'. A tough shrub that seems to flourish anywhere.



Mine is new, no more than two feet tall, but one day it will serve its purpose of helping to block off the view to the bottom of the garden and I suspect it won't take long.

I have thoroughly enjoyed wandering around my garden today, and as I had my mind set on spotting flowers I didn't even stop to pull up one weed! *Judy gardens in Sudbury, Suffolk.*

And another lovely contribution from Sue Hood:

Christmas morning dawns fine after many days of rain. I have ventured out to walk the garden in search of flowers still showing colour for the CGS survey before setting off to our daughter's for lunch. My garden is average size, on top of a hill in Berkhamsted, Herts. We have been here for 3 years so the garden is still in progress, but aren't they all? The soil is heavy clay interspersed with flints of varying sizes.



I find the following:

Primulas: Pink with yellow centre, maroon with yellow centres, pale yellow with yellow centre. *Schizostylis coccinea* 'Major': one faded bloom but new bud now showing red colour. Antirrhinum: several self sown in crack between base of wall and paved area, pale pink and yellow. *Erigeron karvinskianus*: hasn't stopped flowering since bought this summer! Winter pansies, of course. Roses: 'Graham Thomas' - one faded bloom, one inherited with house; think it's 'Superstar', has five good blooms but has had no leaves for months. 'Darcy Bussell' - one fading bloom. 'Lady of Shalott', 2 good flowers and 8 new buds - in its second year and has been fantastic since bought from David Austin last year. 'The Fairy,' brought from our previous house, is covered in blooms from pink through beige to brown. Two bushes of hybrid teas, inherited so no names - one dark pink, one ruby red. 'Scarborough Fair' another fantastic 'doer' from David Austin brought from previous house, as was a gift from a special friend. It has many blooms still and new buds coming. Scabious with large, dark brown, almost purple flowers still hanging on. *Primula vulgaris* one bloom peeping through fallen leaves. Penstemon soft dark pink, inherited with house.

Disappointments: The last fuschia flower which had been bravely hanging on was finally finished off by the beautiful hoar frost we had a week ago. Red bloom is lying beside bush on floor. I have a bud on the new *Mahonia aquifolium*, but no colour visible. My friend 10 miles away has an established bush covered with their spikey yellow blooms right now. No hellebores are out yet. *Magnolia stellata* has buds, but no colour.

Its now drizzling, so the ink on my pad is blotched and running and I need to go indoors and get ready for the festivities.

Sue gardens in Hertfordshire.

Now see over for further contributions from our members...

Christmas day flowers

Top marks to **Pamela Ingraham - Foster** in The Forest of Dean, who listed **28** flowers in bloom in her garden. They included borage, a strawberry plant in fruit, *Rosa* 'Crown Princess Margareta' and *Corydalis lutea*.

In close second place, **Janet Johnson**, from Tolpuddle, Dorset counted **26**: 'Here is my list of Christmas Day blooms - not as many as I usually find, but then it's been a very funny year hasn't it?' Her list includes *Chrysanthemum* 'Carmine Blush', *Fuchsia* 'Lottie Hobby', *Galanthus* 'Limetree', groundsel, *Knautia macedonica*, *Penstemon* 'Old Candy Pink' and *Primula* 'Belarina Nectarine'.

Marilynne Bainbridge of Cranleigh found **21** on Boxing day - her garden was flooded on Christmas Day for the first time in 28 years! Her list includes *Rosa chinensis* 'Crimson Bengal' and *Ribes laurifolium*.

Kate Lindley, who sent the lovely letter reproduced on page 5, counted **18** in her garden in North Wales; they included *Teucrium fruticans*, 2 varieties of lavender and *Hebe* 'Nicola's Blush'. **Jill Hockley** of Foxton near Cambridge managed **15**; her list includes achillea, marigold and penstemon.

Penny Mott, also **15**, says 'My list includes *Erigeron karvinskianus*, *Osteospermum* 'Cannington Roy', *Salvia microphylla*, fuchsia and achillea. I garden in Cornwall, where we have another CGS - the Cornwall Garden Society, but no local Cottage Garden Society group'.

Jo Webber also in Cornwall (*there you are - a Cornwall group!*) and **Val Wray**, Wirral group member, counted **11** apiece, and regular contributor to the magazine, **Carol Rouse**, counted **9** - including a marsh marigold in her pond.

Finally, from **Nicola Grimshaw**: 'I read my December newsletter and took a walk around my garden on Christmas Day... unfortunately this year, all I had in flower was *Viburnum bodnantense* 'Dawn', some yellow pansies and one viola...with half an acre this was a pretty poor show! But we only moved here 6 months ago and so I am still learning what is hidden in the garden, and what I need to do to bring colour to each of the seasons... I hope to report more flowers on Christmas Day 2013!'

Along with **Vivien Squance** in Monmouthshire, I counted **12** in my mother's garden, favourite being one flower on a *Polyanthus* 'gold lace' I'd brought in one of the many containers from my old garden. So, just piped sister Jo, above, to the post! Many thanks to you all, and any that were received too late to be included. *Julia*