

A GARDEN IS A THING OF BEAUTY AND A JOB FOR EVER

Well folks the garage re-ordering project is now virtually finished, and I was ready to gloat and rest on my laurels. I even had the temerity to invite inspection, my ready for inspection Captain Mannering moment.

I sat down, monarch of all I surveyed, and the boss said we would have coffee in the now refurbished outdoor office. I placed a chair in what I thought was the perfect viewing position and then I heard "oh my God ,look at the window".

Yours truly had totally forgotten that if you needed a room with a view you should be able to see out through the window.

So, the coffee was finished, and I was furnished with a substance alien to me called Mr Muscle window cleaner accompanied by two cloths. After some spraying, some stretches and flexing of muscles the garage window took on a more transparent look and was deemed acceptable by the powers that be.

And so, project garage is complete, and my attention is directed to garden furniture that must be cleaned up and stored for the winter season.

I head for the first small set and duly unscrew the top and we find a suitable safe place for its winter hibernation. The top was fine, but the underpinning legs were not too healthy looking . They were displaying a horrible rusty look with the outer layer of skin peeling off in several places. This situation needed attention and had to be assigned special category rainy day status . This job fell within my DIY competency range and so it was agreed that we should purchase some rust proof paint.

I duly went to my paint man who warmly welcomed me, and I finished up leaving the shop with Hammerite anti rust paint, sandpaper, white spirit and paint brush. Life can be so difficult for DIY people with all this shopping and queuing and face masks.

Later that day I go to son in law telling him about my purchases and he gently suggests that the steel legs needed a rub on a grinder and not the sandpaper treatment. He has one of these grinders and he has kindly offered to do the grinding job as prep work for the main painting event.

Next on the list were the outside lights, you know the old type ones with the 60-watt screw in bulbs. We have 4 such specimens erected many years ago and the general verdict was that they were useless. The lumens were not providing enough illumination around the sides of the house. It was left to yours truly to investigate.

I took off the covers and they were an algae green colour, and definite light blockers. It was decreed that they be soaked in washing powder. I was in favour of soaking them in bleach but that was unanimously outvoted by a straight one to one majority. They were duly soaked in washing powder and hot water and rubbed and dried and re- erected.

Any way at dusk, in my role as examiner of luminosity, I checked the brightness and I must say there was at least a doubling of light being beamed down on the external cobbles and bins. Another successful transparent project was completed. It has been agreed by household management that this should be on our annual list instead of being done every 5 years or more.

I'm sure you all know that there will always be jobs to be done around the garden. I know because now we look at the flagstones and paths at the back and around the sides . There is a lovely mossy greenness in places while others have a dirty black hue on them. I should have left the lights and garage window alone . Everything is now visible, and all jobs must be listed and advanced.

In former years I would just connect the power hose and blasted everything clean. This was fine until we noticed that we were damaging the surface of the flags as well.

Now it happened ,last year, that I was talking to the caretaker of a local hotel and I remarked how clean the flags always looked. He told me that he just goes up to the supermarket and buys their cheapest bleach , dilutes it with 3 or 4 parts water and then sprinkles it on the flagstones with a watering can, leaving it on them for about 30 minutes while rubbing with a hard brush and then rinsing it all off and voila, hey presto we have clean flags. That will be my method in mid-November. Supermarket here I come on the bleach trail aka Donald Trump medication.

But lest we take any comfort from new methodology with flags and the lessening of labour I am reminded that there is a far bigger job of work lurking in the background. It's loosely called autumn garden-maintenance which is an ongoing ,time consuming task that cannot be neglected .

At this time of year there is the daily dead heading of dahlias, hydrangeas, roses, rudbeckia gold strum, fuchsias , St Johnsworth. Shrubs must get their winter trim and shaping. Hedges must get their final nip and tuck. The list goes on from day to day. I may sometimes complain about it but generally it is a labour of love . It is fantastic therapy and definitely can be recommended to all. I just could not imagine life without gardening.

Now is also a lovely time for getting a bit of colour in the window boxes to cheer up those dull days of winter. This year we planted some polyanthus and bellis and violas which should give lots of colour for the winter. As Sigmond Freud said "Flowers are lovely to look at, they have neither emotions nor conflicts."

It is also time to be thinking of spring and plentiful planting of bulbs. We have 5 big pots deep planted with daffodils. `Deep planting allows you to overplant summer bedding plants when the daffodils fade away. We have been planting lots of dwarf daffodils and tulips in addition to the usual crocus and muscari [the grape hyacinth] bulbs now.

The final act for getting winter ready in the garden is the erecting of the bird feeders strategically placed around the garden. It's time to get in supplies of bird seed , peanuts , and fat balls to ensure that our feathered friends survive the winter months and hopefully a few of them will return the compliment and nest in our garden next spring.

Don't forget to clear all gutters and drains to keep the heavy rains draining away.

So, there you have it ,lovely colour in the window boxes, emerging bulbs to bloom from February till May and birds merrily chirping away in the background.

With all this around us we will be happier, healthier and more relaxed people post lockdowns.

As Claude Monet famously said" My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece"

Ar aghaidh libh.

Mick O Callaghan

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