

Coiled Spring – the late Spring heralds an intense time-compressed burst of growth...

Friday 26 April, 2013

After the coldest March since 1963 and one of the longest winters most of us care to remember, the arrival of the warm weather has ushered in a tremendous burst of intense Spring growth. Suddenly, the long dormant leaf buds are opening and the greening of the countryside is happening with a pace that is truly extraordinary. Flowering plants that have been holding back in the cold are now throwing themselves skywards as they attempt to make up for lost time in their race for pollination.

At the Tropical Britain nursery we've seen plants flowering with a vigour that is reminiscent of the kind of time-lapse cinematography we sometimes see in botanical documentaries. *Darmera peltata*, or Indian Rhubarb, a gigantic tropical-looking hardy exotic from the Pacific Northwest was among the first to signal its growth. Its pink star-shaped flowers are borne aloft a tall stalk and rise from the bare soil – a sight that even in an ordinary year is a seasonal delight – but this year the appearance of the blooms was so rapid it was literally overnight. A mature specimen of this amazing plant transforms from a delicate pink flower to an enormous foliage plant in the space of a few months and by mid-summer stands up to 1.5m high. It will be very interesting to see how it performs within the time-constraints of this year's compressed Spring.

Arum maculatum, the humble Cuckoo Pint is another plant we've seen rocket into bloom. Probably the most exotic-looking of all the native plants, the Cuckoo Pint has long been associated with Spring growth in British folklore. Its curiously suggestive shape – an elongated spadix nestling in a green spathe - has given it many common names: Lords and Ladies, Adder's Tongue, Devils and Angels, Cows and Bulls, Dog's Dibble, Adam and Eve, Priest's Pintle, Sweethearts, Bobbins, Naked Boys... the list goes on; all symbolic of erotic ardour and the quickening of spirits that accompanies Spring. Thomas Hardy, writing in 'Far from the Madding Crowd' likened it to 'an apopleptic saint in a niche of malachite ...'

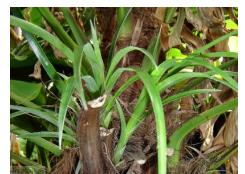
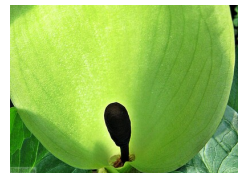
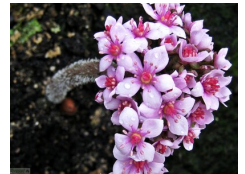
At the nursery it's a favourite. A native plant, we grow *Arum maculatum* from seed, says Tropical Britain's owner John Edmiston... 'it should never be collected from the wild.'

Another wonderful plant that is just starting to flower is *Billbergia nutans* from Brazil. It is the hardiest of all the Bromeliad family and survived outdoors through the winter of 2010-11 when temperatures went down to a numbing -14C. Its delicate flowers spike up from the spidery foliage and are held aloft on long delicate bracts of soft pink with clusters of small green pendulous flowers edged with an exquisite tone of metallic-blue. It makes an ideal epiphytic plant to nestle in the crooks of branches or the trunks of the hardy palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei*.

The British weather is invariably variable but even if delayed the seasons still manage to follow one another. This year, the Spring - though late - promises to be equally memorable for its dramatic and heightened short-lived intensity.

Tropical Britain is an online nursery that specialises in affordably-priced [hardy exotics and tropical garden plants uk](#)

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