

Year End Walkabout

Written by Alice Massey

Wednesday, 30 December 2015 07:39



This is the time of year when traditions reign. Every family has their own and at our home, without fail and barring bad weather, I photograph our garden especially noting what is blooming on Christmas Day each year. If we are out of town I do this on New Year's Day. I'll cheat a bit and take photos early this year so I can still get the article in on time.

Digital photography has made it easy for me to file the pictures by year and then go back and compare how a plant has grown, or not, as the case may be. I saw where I had lost a number of plants to the past two harsh winters we experienced. At first I did not notice they were gone but the camera did. The unseasonably warm weather earlier in December has certainly impacted what is blooming.

So here goes, this is what is blooming around my home this week and perhaps at yours too.

There are quite a few salvias still going strong. The late blooming *Salvia involucrata* or Rosebud Sage, which I almost lost to too much rain earlier this year is particularly pretty and still covered with rosy pink flowers. Much of the large, spreading plant drowned but enough remained and if the weather cooperates next year it will be large again.

The Nun's Orchids, *Phaius tankervilleae*, are putting up multiple bloom spikes. The weather seems to have confused them as it is sort of early for them to be showing off. These terrestrial orchids must be protected if the temperature drops into the high 30's.

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While there are many magnolias in the neighborhood, one Little Gem has been in full bloom throughout December. This is unusual and it seems strange that only one tree would be blooming.

Camellias, like 'Lady Clare,' that normally flower in February at my home, are already in full bloom. The Cannas haven't stopped flowering; you have to love such easy care plants. Did you know Aspidistra blooms? This time of year they have small, waxy, half inch, pink or burgundy colored flowers at the base of the leaves . They are usually hidden in the mulch where we cannot appreciate them.

Roses have loved the warm weather and while the bushes are looking like they might need a bit of a nap; the flowers, with few insects to bother them, are in perfect shape.

A late blooming shell ginger, *Alpinia zerumbet*, caught my eye. It has a very tropical look that does not look right in January.

While not at all out of season, the lovely blooms on my lavender Encore Azalea are quite large and striking this year. This plant was a giveaway from the grower at a gardening symposium years ago but I just can't seem to love it. I feel there is a place for the Encores in the garden but I haven't found the right spot for them in mine.

Huge pots of begonias, geraniums and New Guinea impatiens still adorn the neighborhood and without the summer sun and heat to bleach them, the colors are intense and festive in keeping with the season.

Other summer annuals like marigolds are still going strong and the winter flowers like the pansies and snaps look better than ever.

Despite the fact that we are still enjoying the autumn flowers and we don't know what winter will bring, the winter solstice has passed. As the days begin to lengthen it is time for fresh beginnings. Each day will be a few minutes longer and we are that much closer to spring and new gardening experiences. I recently read a line in a gardening blog that hit home: "Last

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year's errors are only lessons for the future."

My photos do remind me of a few errors, maybe more than a few if I am honest. But, that is OK. I treasure what is here now and I will learn from the errors.

Happy New Gardening Year, everyone.