

Kilmington Gardening Club September Talk

Creative Gardening with Bulbs Lady Skelmersdale

www.kilmingtongardeningclub.co.uk

Lady Christine Skelmersdale has impressive credentials. Author of two books on bulbs and a frequent contributor to *Gardeners' World*, *The Garden*, the *Telegraph* among others, she holds the Victoria Medal of Honour from the RHS, was a member of the RHS Council for 11 years, and is Vice Chairman of the Bulb Committee and a member of the Daffodil and Tulip Yearbook Committee.

She said that bedding is an expensive way to use bulbs, as they will usually be dug up and thrown away after flowering, leaving bare soil. Borders need to work all year round, so a succession of bulbs, interspersed with perennials which will grow up around them, gives far more pleasing results. She suggested December-flowering crocus *laevigatus*, a snow-hardy variety, followed by snowdrops (if you want them to spread, it is essential to divide them after flowering; recommended taller varieties are *Magnet*, *Viridapice* and *Wendy's Gold*). Combine these with winter aconites, followed by crocuses and primroses.

Around the dry base of trees and under shrubs, mass plantings of *Colchicums*, *Muscari*, *Chionodoxas* and *Sternbergias* work well. The leaves of *Cyclamen hederifolium* will last for 6 months before disappearing.

In grass, *crocus tommasinianus* will seed itself around freely, while *crocus speciosus* will flower for almost 3 months. The leaves of shorter daffodils such as *bulbocodium* (hoop petticoat), *Kokopelli* or *Toto* show up less in grass. Alliums come up year after year, but tulips will not persist. *Camassias* and snakeshead fritillaries need damp ground. To achieve a naturalistic effect, scatter the bulbs - on no account plant them in straight lines.

Knotting the leaves of daffodils after flowering will damage growth, they need to be left for at least 6 weeks before mowing off. Nearly all the daffodils available in this country are sterile, so deadheading is unnecessary unless for aesthetic reasons.

For pots and containers, Lady Skelmersdale advised that it is best to buy fresh bulbs every year and not economise – a pack of bulbs costs little more than a coffee and lasts a lot longer! Planting tulips in layers rarely works, as they will generally all flower at once. Place the tallest bulbs in the centre of the pot, with medium-height bulbs around them and shorter ones such as crocuses, *anemone blanda* or grape hyacinths around the edge. Pots look good grouped together. In summer, lilies, *acidanthera* and *eucomis* (pineapple flower) look spectacular, but they must be kept really well watered. John Innes No. 2 compost gives the best results.

Lady Skelmersdale's talk offered us such a wealth of advice and inspiration that it is difficult to do justice to it in a such a short space.

Beverley Perkins