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## From My Garden

### The Magic of Green

By H. E. Bates



The magic of green begins not, as you might suppose, in April, but in January; and also not, as you again might suppose, with leaf, but with flower.

Let me at once confess to a slight battiness about green flowers, whose name is legion. A great many of these belong to our native flora but are by no means to be despised on that account. Our two native hellebores (Christmas Rose) are green, the one *H. viridis* being pure green, the other *H. foetidus* being green slightly touched with purple. Interesting though these species are they cannot come within a space flight to Venus of the superb architecture of the apple green *H. argenteifolius*. Here is a noble thing, our undoubted winter queen.

I give this plant the highest possible marks. The great purity of its chaste apple green flowers can last as long as four months in bloom. The striking architecture of its big prickled-edged leaves, so like thick three-fingered hands, are renewed all the year round, so that the plant is almost an evergreen shrub, about three feet high. It is also prodigal of seed, which often sows itself.

Of euphorbias, another family full of green progeny, it is impossible to write in any detail, since there are more than a thousand species, among which are seventeen natives of our own. But *Euphorbia griffithii* most certainly must be saluted. Its reddish orange stems begin to appear in early spring, presently to be capped by flower heads at first sight wholly of the same colour but, on closer inspection, beautifully touched with a strange tender green. As late as July a few flowers will still persist, now more green than red, with the crowded handsome leaves more attractive than ever. Of its many sisters I like *E. epithymoides*, the flowers of which seem at a cursory glance to be of lemon yellow but in which again I detect a flush of green.

Those who know *Cytisus praecox*, that well-behaved compact broom, and *Paeonia*

*Mlokosewitschii* may be prepared to dispute my contention that their flowers too are of a curious shade of green—almost identical; but my own eye tells me that green is there, even as it tells me that green touches the so-called white variety of *Cobaea scandens*, a truly beautiful rapid summer climber easily raised from seed and a far superior plant to its better-known and pucey cousin. What is indisputable is that both broom and paeony, the latter coming from the Caucasus, give off almost precisely the same harsh, astringent odour, which in the broom at any rate is objectionable and hardly less so in the paeony. Can colour and odour be linked? The question fascinates.

But what is certain is that I would never be without these two plants, the broom always keeping its shape impeccably, unlike so many of its family, and the paeony having the additional virtue of providing a glorious piece of dramatics in the autumn in the shape of its seeds. These are like shining blue-black pearls lying in lime-green jewel cases lined with bright vermilion velvet.

Summer will give us much more in the way of green blossom, a notable example

Zinnia Envy



being *Alchemilla mollis*, commonly called Lady's Mantle, a ground-cover confection of green lace and wavy leaves that marries splendidly with almost any flowers of ruby or mauve. But spring still has, for me, another most worthy beauty to offer: the so-called Widow Iris, or Mourning Iris, formerly *Iris tuberosa* and now known, I believe, as *Hermodecylus tuberosa* (another mouthful of grit). This amazing mixture of apple green and parsonic black appears almost with slyness in April, the little iris-shaped flowers suddenly revealing themselves as if by a conjuring trick. In all the gardening year there is nothing quite like this, the combination of green and black giving it an almost orchid-like quality.

So to three high summer green beauties, not only richly rewarding but unfastidious: a comparatively new zinnia called Envy that looks like a rosette dipped in lime-green icing; a version of the old love-lies-bleeding, again in pure green, the tassels having the extra virtue of being easily dried for winter decoration and of keeping their colour in the process; and lastly my favourite—second only to the queenly hellebore—*Nicotiana Lime Green* (tobacco plant). This marvellously good little plant flowers on and on with graceful abandon from June onwards, of the loveliest pure green, day and night.

Finally a red-hot poker that isn't red-hot at all but pure lemon green. *Knifophia* Maid of Orleans does poorly in my light dry loam but will grow both heartily and gracefully on heavier food. A strange sea-thistle, *Eryngium bromelaeifolium* appears, however, to relish the lighter fare. It has green thistle-heads that look like part of the regalia of an ancient king, all surrounded by a bodyguard of serrated leaf-swords at prickly readiness. © Evesford Productions Ltd., 1967

Nicotiana Lime Green

