

Finding Balance in the Garden in May

The Ice Saints (Holies or Cold Sophie)

You might have heard of the Ice Saints in the old farmers' traditions all over Europe.

It is said that from the 11-13 (in some traditions there are 5 days) there is more danger of frost.

A lot of research has gone into that and in Kew gardens they reviewed their weather records and found that the 11. and 12. were often the warmest days in May and on the 13. the temperature suddenly dropped drastically.

Though be aware that the last frosts are on average still possible around the 25. May and for the north or higher altitudes add two more weeks.

Last year we had ground frost beginning of June.



Enhancing Biodiversity in the garden

Protect your garden from the increasingly strong drying winds and intense sunshine by planting ornamental and flowering plants in your garden and in the ends of your vegetable beds. This will protect your garden from excessive heat or cold and also provides food for the wildlife, "catching two birds with one stone" or let's change the saying to "feeding all the flying creatures in the garden".

How can we attract, control and deter wildlife that is both beneficial and detrimental to our crops, if they are in imbalance?

Let's start with attracting birds and predator insects.

Birds of prey, songbirds and predator insects are essential to keep a balance in the world of rodents, with pigeons and insects.

For this it is essential to have hedges and sources of water in the garden, which will by the way attract more species of wildlife than any other form of diversification in the garden or farm or rewilding.

We need to be aware to provide food for the birds particularly in the times of transition, before and after migration and when they feed newly hatched birds.

They need high energy and protein food.

This is provided by fruits with seeds and our annual, wild herbs and vegetable plants, which we let go to seed besides all the worms and grubs they like to collect from our garden.

To achieve this, we can plant a diverse expression of perennial flowering shrubs, annuals, biennial and perennial flowers with delicious fruit and seeds for the birds and nectar and pollen for the insects.

Perennial flowering shrubs suggested for this purpose are:

Rosa rugosa

Berberis ssp

Ilex aquafolium

Mahonia ssp.

Skimmia japonica

Symphoricarpos (Snowberry)

Viburnum davidii (*Viburnum*)

Viburnum opulus (Guelder Rose)

Pyracantha

Cotoneaster

Symac ssp (Stag's Horn)

Let wild herbs go to seed and feed the birds (all of these also edible plants for humans):

Senecio vulgaris (Groundsel)

Sonchus arvensis (Sowthistles)

Chenopodium album (Fat hen)

Solanum nigrum (Black nightshade)

Stellaria media (Chickweed)

To attract a diversity of butterflies and create a balance to curtail dominance of White Cabbage Butterflies:

Lunaria Annua (Honesty)

Valeriana off.

Buddleia

Nettles

Verbascum (Mullein)

Cosmos

Zinnias,

Scabious, etc.

As most of our fruiting plants need also the bees let's make sure to plant a plentiful supply of nectar all year round.

All Mediterranean herbs of the labiatieae family are most suited and double up as companions for our vegetables to repel pests and also are most helpful to be eaten with our vegetables to enhance the digestion and the absorption of the nutrition, we might not get otherwise from our food plants.

Furthermore, plant Phacelia, Comfrey, Sunflowers, Calendulas and French Marigold, Nicotiana off. (Ornamental tabaco), Sweet Peas, etc.

I wish you now a relaxing time in the garden with the glory of the pallet of colours, textures, scents and aromas and buzzing and twittering of the birds.

With hopes for warmer weather, some strong thunderstorms in May

Happy gardening greetings,

Hans-Günther

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