

GARDEN NEWS

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IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME

At the turn of the year, when the icy temperatures and dark evenings seemed set for an eternity, it felt like a good idea to use the bleak days to put in hand two major projects for which there was just never enough time to do properly in other seasons. We had completed the twelve-week bulb-planting marathon; we would be able to cope with the usual winter maintenance tasks, like mulching, in-between these more exciting plans. Yes, the people due to renovate the path would be on site, but that heavy landscaping work could easily go-ahead alongside our horticultural activities.

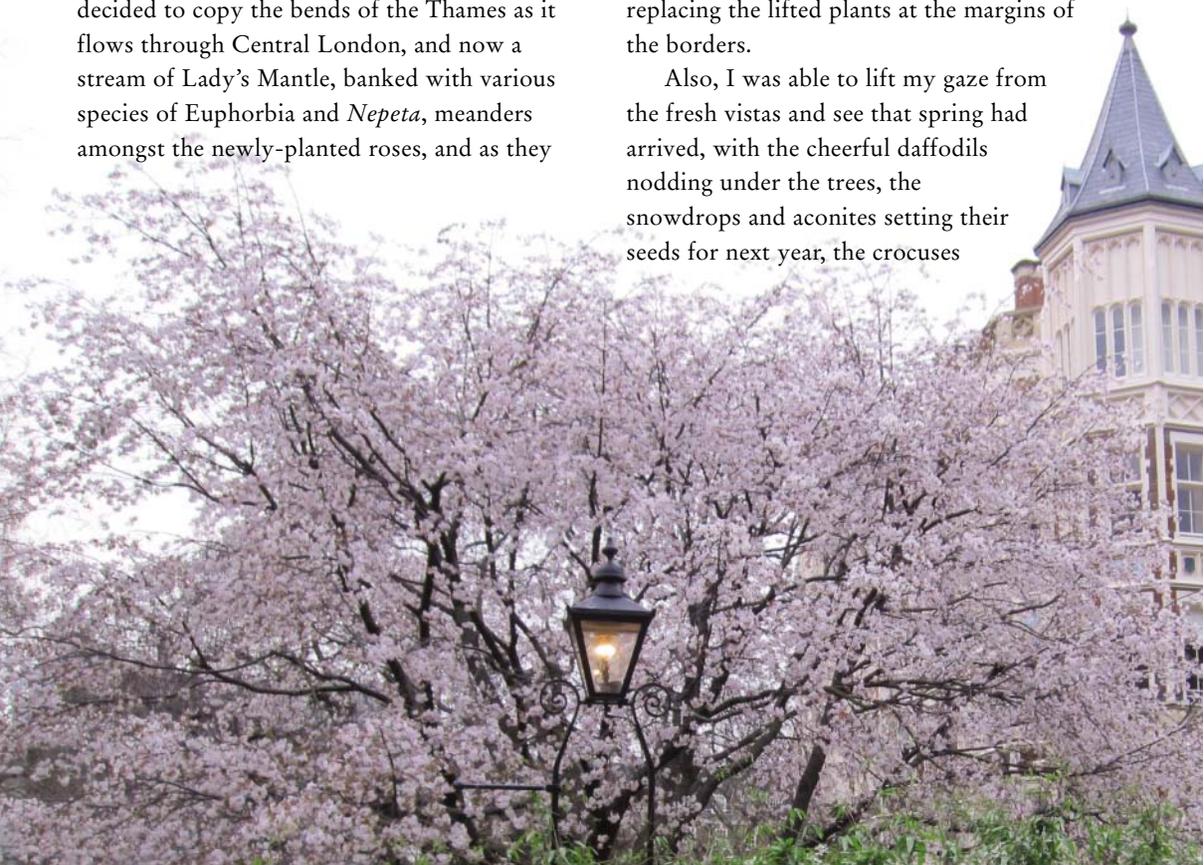
To be frank, I had been itching for some time to get my hands on the rose beds and bring them into the 21st Century, replacing the old and ailing hybrid teas from the '70s with stronger English shrub roses, under-planting them with more traditional companions. The borders at the top of the bank are narrow and I needed to play with the height of the roses and other plants to create more depth. Standing by the sun-dial and looking towards the river, I decided to copy the bends of the Thames as it flows through Central London, and now a stream of Lady's Mantle, banked with various species of Euphorbia and *Nepeta*, meanders amongst the newly-planted roses, and as they

put on growth their varied heights will trick the eye into believing the beds are wider than they are.

I followed this theme of movement in the new design beside Paper Buildings and its mirror by Harcourt Buildings. The yews will be given a contemporary cut, creating the impression of a flowing series of buttresses. These will bring much better cohesion and structure to the whole garden, and properly include the Harcourt side into the whole. Or to put it in less phoney design-speak, they will create a wind barrier and break up the long and monotonous stretch of the War of the Roses Border, which can now embrace a far more varied choice of bedding plants.

The planning phase was a doddle compared to the execution. I got through the week of heavy labour planting 160 mature yews on a mixture of adrenalin and ibuprofen, and can now afford the luxury of laughing without my rib cage muscles complaining. Then it was straight into following the contractors as they placed the new edgings around the path, back-filling the lawn's edges ready for new turf and replacing the lifted plants at the margins of the borders.

Also, I was able to lift my gaze from the fresh vistas and see that spring had arrived, with the cheerful daffodils nodding under the trees, the snowdrops and aconites setting their seeds for next year, the crocuses





at last flourishing on the sloping banks. The latter beautiful display was in large part due to the visits of the Harris hawk dispersing the feral pigeons, so that no longer do we just have the heart-breaking sight of the young crocus buds scattered on the grass. Apart from one resilient couple trying to nest on the roof of 1 Paper Buildings, the flying vandals have now found new resting places, leaving the song-birds to flourish in our Garden, only intermittently disturbed by a visiting pigeon or two trying to peck their way through the protective pea-sticks to get at the new grass seed.

The tulips are beginning to show their first colours, the new roses are throwing out fresh shoots, and in the potting shed and greenhouse there is a veritable production line of seed-sowing, pricking-out and potting-on. Thanks to the commitment and to the physical and mental strengths of my staff and volunteers we have achieved all we set out to do. Though it probably would have been an even better idea from the boss not to have quite so many projects going on at the same time ...

