

## Two Pots of Lavender

It all begins with two pots of lavender.

I have decided I am not going to *do* garden this year. It is a decision based on several diverse factors. A creaking spine that doesn't want to bend for a start; not to mention the dodgy knees that send fiery darts in all directions on being required to kneel. Both of these are accompanied by an all pervading weakness, which prevents the return from prayerful to vertical, without recourse to an undignified manoeuvre, reminiscent of a giant toddler getting to its feet. Reasons enough you might say but there are more.

Principally, rabbits. Not just the occasional Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail but regular battalions of the fluffy fiends; all intent on devouring every last succulent new leaf; be it rose, carnation, parsley, lettuce or spinach. Compounding their assault, anything that is planted in freshly dug or tended soil, but not quite to their taste, is unceremoniously hurled aside in excavations for multiple burrow extensions, to accommodate their rapidly increasing families. All this activity takes place covertly between dusk and dawn. Done and dusted, devastation is complete by 6 a.m. and not a rabbit in sight.

I put wire cages around my roses but it is not aesthetically pleasing. I fence off the vegetable plot with chicken wire. That will stop the bunnies in their tracks. But it's not pretty. The pigeons watch my struggle with post and wire from the cherry tree. They murmur softly to each other. So sweet! Then as soon as the peas poke through and put up a couple of shoots, they swoop down and scoff the lot.

Moles tunnel unseen under the lawn and emerge slap bang in the middle of the onion patch and then again in the opposite direction from the hedge to uproot the courgettes. Only a few feet away there is a ten acre field where they could tunnel to their hearts content. The universe seems to have made an executive decision to foil all my attempts to '*grow my own*'. So you win universe. I give up; throw in the trowel.

During the autumn I cover the veg' beds with black weed matting and tidy up all the stray bricks to hold it in place before covering it with several sacks of bark. This results in rectangular, dark brown minimalist patches; easy on the eye and soothing to the psyche. Through the winter months my thoughts stray to sundials, water features, a small sculpture perhaps and then, more realistically to a few pots in the summer.

That is where the lavender comes in. It catches my eye, as it was surely meant to do, from trays stacked outside the supermarket. Two pots for a fiver. Sold, to the lady in gardening grief.

I plant them in a trough outside the back door and, in so doing, remember what I have always known ... never buy plants in twos. They always yearn for a third.

I return from the nearby nursery, the supermarket having now sold out, with four more lavenders at three times the price. One to go with the previous two and three for another trough. Oh, and a rosemary to complement their grey foliage during the winter. You can see where this is going I expect.

Aesthetically, when you put complementary colours together they cry out for a contrast and these plants now nag me relentlessly every time I go out to the bin. They nag when I put the milk bottles out and when I bring the milk in.

"Shut up!" I say. "I'm not doing garden this year."

The bay leaves nod sagely from their pot beside the door. But the roses chorus, "We won't be in flower for ages yet. That lavender needs colour now!"

**I go into town to post a parcel and, from the margins of a market stall, I am accosted by a mob of deep purple violas with cheeky orange faces. I ignore them and hurry past to the post office. But in that uncanny way that flowers have, the violas sidle into my mind's eye and plant themselves in the old, wooden barrow, near the lavender and beneath a dark green cotoneaster. To be fair, they do look exactly right. Even the milkman said so.**

**"Look nice them, in there," he said.**

**"More! More!" scream the roses; still hedging their bets on whether to bloom in early June or not.**

**A few flame coloured, trailing petunias later, I suddenly find myself sowing lettuce seed in trays and just popping a few dwarf beans in a pot. This, inevitably, leads to some tentative digging inside the chicken run; lately vacated, fortuitously it would now seem, by the last geriatric chicken.**

**I'm really NOT doing garden this year; just a few pots here and there, and over here and over there.**