

Garden Logue: February 20  
William Moss

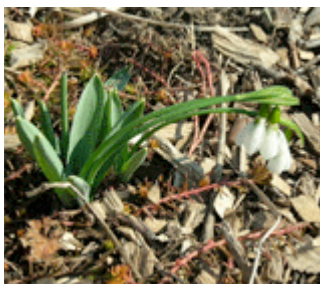
Here in the singles, the winters have been mild. The last big snowstorm I remember was in Jan 99. This winter started off frigid, but then became so mild that we began to feel and act more like our brethren from downstate than our near neighbors in Wisconsin. Biking and sweatshirts replaced cross-country skiing and parkas.

The body and the mind have an amazing ability to adjust and prepare for the weather based on the recent pattern. 70 degrees during July nights feel cool. 70 degrees during March days seem hot. A few days of unusual circumstances (especially if they are pleasant) can set up unrealistic expectations.

That is why the Return Of Winter was such a shock to my system. My body had forgotten how below zero air stings the nostrils. I also needed a refresher course on Chicago's "hawk". I believe the principle states, that when the thermometer hovers around zero, the slightest breeze becomes a biting wind capable of piercing through clothing like the talons of a raptor.

After cowering for a few days (hopelessly waiting for spring temps to return) I steeled my resolve and determined to reacclimate my body to the cold. "I like frigid weather", I reminded myself. So I donned my long johns, thermal socks, thick pants, fleece pullover, heavy coat, lined gloves, and two hats, then went to my garden.

No one was outside. The park that was crowded with joggers, bikers, and dog-walkers was empty. Ground that had been soft and springy just two weeks ago was frozen solid.



Happily, the early snowdrops are bowed but not broken. I don't know if the flowers will be able to raise their heads proudly again, but the leaves looked just fine. Snowdrops are truly amazing plants that every gardener should have to remind them of the strength and determination of life.

All the plants appeared to survive, though worst for the wear. The tips of daffodils and leucojum were burned by the sub-zero weather, but the flower buds are still safe in the ground. Hellebores leaves looked flattened and spent. Perhaps this is an adaptation of hellebores to protect the crown from extreme cold. The leaves collapse and provide cover for the swollen buds.

The spring witch hazel also took action against the chill. She curled her petals for protection. The hardy flowers are visible but not showy with their bright petals rolled away and the sweet scented nectar retracted, waiting for a warmer day.

The sedums have “bronzed over”. Gardener’s know that evergreen plants are not always the same color green. Spring green is different from summer green and from winter green. Many evergreen herbaceous groundcovers become darker in winter. Only a couple of weeks ago my *Sedum album* was a bright lively green, indicating photosynthesis and root growth. Since the cold snap, the succulents were the shade of a withering rose leaf from a spent Valentine’s Day bouquet.

The garden acclimated just fine. As I studied the plants, I noticed that I was fine too. Wrapped up in my winter gear, I could have stayed outside for hours. It is cold, but this is Chicago. So do your worst Jack Frost. You only have a few more weeks to bother us and I have yet to wear my earmuffs.

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