

WINTER CHEER



Clematis cirrhosa



Clematis cirrhosa

Winter? What winter? The 'winter' in Antalya, has so far been very mild, in fact barely noticeable for a former resident of northern Europe. Although the season is overall dry (so far), heavy rains have now arrived and plant growth has been continuous since October. There is still time for a cold blast, but I strongly suspect this year will be an early one.

Visiting my much-favoured Termessos, I gave never seen so much *Clematis cirrhosa* in bloom, from long trailing strands dangling elegant creamy bells amidst the red fruits of strawberry trees to big blankets smothering shrubs or wonderful fountains of flower bursting from rock crevices. This widespread shrub goes virtually unnoticed during the summer, revealing its true abundance now. In summer, its cousin, *C. flammula*, creates frothy masses of creamy stars in its place.

The red fruits of *Arbutus andrachne* are joined by various others at this time from *Pistaccia terebrinthus* to the glossy bunches of blood-red *Smilax aspera*. Like *Clematis*, this is a climber, but unlike *Clematis*, its stems are lined with vicious thorns and it is the bane of hikers in macchie and woods, snagging clothes and ripping skin. However, even this formidable plant has its upside and just sometimes one finds a display



Crocus biflorus subsp. *nubigena*



Smilax aspera



Anemone coronaria

of fruits that warrants attention. Indeed, this particular mass display only needs a dusting of snow (or tinsel) to be the perfect seasonal wreath. There was more. Reaching the upper car park, I found the jewel of the day at the base of a big oak tree; a pristine clump of gorgeous *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *nubigena*, each outer tepal finely-painted with purple feathers, the anthers black and contrasting with vivid red styles. A winter pick me up if ever there was one.

I visited the historical site of Olimpos later in the week, and both here and in the surrounding area there were good things with lots of dainty striped spathes of *Arisarum vulgare* popping out of rock crevices and among the bay woods. There was also a scattering of *Narcissus tazetta* on the cliffs above the beach, but there was more to come later for these. Vibrant *Anemone coronaria* was starting to colour the waysides and in this area one can enjoy the full gamut of its colour range, with everything from pink and mauve to brilliant red or white on show. However, I didn't want to be distracted by these as I was looking for something altogether different, a plant of folklore that also flowers in winter.

Casting a glance into a rather rough patch of ground I saw big rosettes of Swiss chard-



Arisarum vulgare



Narcissus tazetta



Narcissus tazetta



Mandragora officinarum

like leaves that surrounded the beige stars of *Mandragora officinarum* - mandrake. Long thought to have various powers because of the man-like appearance of the roots (it is in fact full of alkaloids) this plant is something of a curiosity. A member of the Solanaceae, it looks nothing like a tomato. Instead, masses of flowers crowd the centre of the plants. Formerly the earlier flowering variants were considered a separate species - *M. autumnalis*, but they are now (sensibly) lumped in one variable species. Even in this small group there was quite a variation on flower colour and shape.

Seeing the *Narcissus tazetta* in flower by the coast had me travelling to another location where sure enough there were many of these deliciously-scented, elegant flowers just beginning to flower. There was not a single spent bloom and I could see hundreds more to come. In places (where locals had rather over-harvested in the past) the leaves formed a pure sward of glaucous *Narcissus* leaves. I plan to return in a week or two to see how this impressive population develops.

It seems I'll get no real break from botanical exploration this year as many orchids and bulbs will be hot on the heels of these winter warmers. It's quite impossible for me to become bored with



Mandragora officinarum