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## **April in the Garden** ~ Brian Crumblehulme

Was not a bunch of carrots worth just as much as a ham?

The day is coming when a single carrot will signify a revolution.  
—Emile Zola, 1886

**T**his wonderful season is characterized by change—it blows hot and then cold, it rains and shines, every half hour. Native species happily tramp on regardless. Tender immigrants are not happy with wind or cold, and get really upset if there is an early morning frost. As I write (in late March) the grasses, roses, rhubarb and fava beans are growing. Daffodils & hyacinths are flowering and, under glass without artificial heat, tomatoes, basil, broccoli, and cauli are reaching skyward.

Any day when it is not raining is a good day to weed and dig over the ground and add a layer of compost with a sprinkling of lime and bone meal. Rich, cultivated earth is Nirvana for weeds so removing them before they flower will save a lot of sweat in May. In this climate I cannot overemphasize the value of a coldframe or greenhouse. This year I am replacing my old wooden raised beds with ones made of concrete half-blocks that are warmer, will not harbor wood bugs, and will last forever with minimum maintenance. And some will get a removable glass top, free courtesy of the recycling depot. That way, regardless of the weather, we will have tomatoes, peppers and melons in the summer, and all the salads and vegetables we need through the winter.

Homes and gardens are works in progress and that implies one or more unfinished projects and sometimes piles of stuff left outside to be dealt with tomorrow, or sometime. These rare collections can become an eyesore and a mental irritant reminding us of what needs to be done when all we want is to relax with a good Scotch. Some plants make a really good temporary screen or cover according to need. For unfinished sheds and larger

structures, hops and runner beans are amazing. Hops is a perennial plant that dies down each winter and starting around this time they send up long tendrils that can reach thirty feet, covered in attractive leaves and yellow flowers all summer long. Two of these vines will self-climb and easily cover a garage in a season. Scarlet runner beans are not beans at all, they are a perennial variety of vetch and given some sun and water, they too will grow up to ten feet, are thick with brilliant bee-loving flowers and the 'beans' are great with Hollandaise sauce. For that pile of rubble or scrap fencing try scattering a handful of nasturtium seeds. Nasturtiums thrive on sun and poor soil, and they too are good to eat.

Speaking of colour: last year's hanging baskets should be hauled out of retirement this month and reconstructed. Baskets are crowded and subject to a lot of sun so make sure the potting compost you use is has plenty of nutrients to feed your plants all summer long and has a good peat or vermiculite base to hold water. For a good show choose plants that really like the heat, geraniums, for example, or petunias. Older types of petunia have a lovely scent attractive to humming birds. And, if like me you enjoy a fine fragrance, put a pinch of night-scented-stock in each basket. These insignificant little plants produce violet-coloured flowers that open only in the evening and produce a fabulous tropical fragrance.

### **This Month's Recipes**

#### **Bouillabaisse**

The traditional dish of Marseilles, Bouillabaisse is essentially a fish stew boiled with herbs. It is more of a cooking method than a recipe and there are as many variations as there are fish in the sea. To make it properly carry a large heavy pot down to the beach, gathering wild herbs along the way.

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Light a driftwood fire, put the herbs in the pot with a litre or so of seawater, then go fishing. Catch at least two varieties of finny fish and while you are dragging your dory back up the beach pick up a few shellfish and a crab or two. Toss all of the above into the pot while you open a bottle of Chateauneuf-du-Rothschild-78 and slip into a tux.

Zealot traditionalists insist that authenticity can be achieved only with a rock fish such as snapper, a little cod, an eel, along with a few mussels, clams and the crab. Though, this list is still in dispute by members of the Bouillabaisse Restaurant Association in Paris.

### **Marseilles Bouillabaisse**

1 onion, 1 clove garlic, 1 leek, & some celery

1/2 cup olive oil

Salt & pepper to taste

2 Kilos very fresh fish such as eel, skate, cod, halibut...

3 tomatoes,

Another onion, a large pinch of saffron, a fennel root & more garlic

Yet more garlic, 2 egg yolks & a hot chili

Mussels, scallops, crab, etc

Chop the vegetables into a large iron pot and fry in the oil until golden. Cut off the heads & tails of your fish and throw them in the pot. Season, cover with water and stew slowly for a half hour. Strain off the stock and return to pot. Add the remaining vegetables. Set the table. Cut the fish into chunks and add to the brew. Pound the last of the garlic with the yolks and chili to make a paste and stir into your elixir. Pour another glass of wine and toss the shellfish into the pot. Cover and cook for five minutes. Serve with a baguette and a spoon.

### **Mocha Cream**

1 egg yolk

1/4 cup strong coffee (is there any other kind?)

1 Tbsp sugar

1 Tbsp shaved chocolate

1 Tbsp Kahlua, or brandy

1/2 cup whipped cream

Beat the yolk, sugar and coffee together. Heat in a saucepan, stirring constantly until thickened. Add the chocolate and liqueur. Fold in the cream. Serve warm or cold with fresh fruit. Or scoop it up with the remains of your baguette. In cases of emergency, use your partner's fingers. ☞