

## **Gardener's Notebook**

### **March, Shamrocks, Lions and Lambs**

by Zelpha Boyd  
Gallatin Empire Garden Club

March just came in like a lion; looks like it's not over yet. But rest assured that she will go out like a lamb, and then we'll have spring.

In the warmer climates the crocus and snow drops are already blooming. We, in the colder climes are holding our own waiting for the winter to end. In the meantime we have St. Patrick's Day to look forward to, with plenty of the green.

The green—as in banners, hats, shirts and Shamrocks—all help us celebrate the season. Shamrocks—those three or four leafed clovers found on St. Pat's Day everywhere—appear as decorations of plastic, paper, chenille and even as live plants.

The original Irish Shamrock—*Trifloium Repens*—is known in Ireland as the white clover and has three heart-shaped leaves. It was held in high esteem by the early Celts of Wales as a charm against evil spirits, representing the holy Trinity; one leaf for the Father, one for the Son and one for the Holy Spirit. An occasional fourth leaf was said to represent God's Grace.

The Allure of the beautiful Shamrock lives on and the “wearnin' o' green” has become a fitting symbol of St. Patrick's Day. It honors both the greening of the earth and St. Patrick, a missionary in Ireland for 40 years.

“The Four-leaf Clovers are supposed to be lucky and rare”, according to the Encyclopedia of Gardening, but are more common than is usually thought. It takes a sharp eye, however to find one among the sea of three-

leafed clovers. My mother had such an eye and could spot them from a distance.

The petals of the Four-leaf Clover have meanings as well. One source says that they stand for Hope, Faith, Love and Luck. The 4-H Clubs have attached Head, Heart, Hands and Health to the leaves in their creed. No wonder we cherish this bit of green plant material, especially this time of year.

The plant we commonly call the Shamrock is actually an Oxalis. There are about 200 varieties of this plant—some being hardy weeds. The most familiar to us are the green, triangular leafed ones growing from bulbs, as house plants. During the first two weeks of March many are sold in floral shops and grocery stores.

The care and feeding of the Shamrock is generally the same as for other house plants. It likes a cool location, strong indirect lighting and moderate amounts of water. Shamrocks benefit from a period of rest during the year. When your plant begins to look a little punky, stop watering. As the leaves turn brown, remove them and set the pot where it will remain cool and dry for about a month.

At the end of its dormant season, resume watering and begin feeding with a well balanced fertilizer. This is also a good time to divide if necessary, replanting the bulbs in a good, slightly sandy, houseplant soil.

Here's wishing you the luck of the Irish! Go purchase a couple of these lucky house plants and share with a friend. I predict that April will come in like a lamb and then we'll have some green outside as well.