

Gardener's Notebook

Primroses in March
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While the winter continues outside, I know that spring is on the way. There are Primroses in the produce section of the grocery store! When the Primroses appear, I know that spring can't be far away. Such a variety of colors, too—orange and yellow, soft creams, bright reds, blues and lavenders. Their leaves form a cluster of light crinkled green, allowing the flowers to rise up out of the center. The plants outside won't bloom until about the first of April, so these cheery outdoor plants, blooming inside, are a real blessing.

Each spring I purchase several primroses—they bloom inside as house plants. When it's warm enough, about the middle of June—I'll transplant them to the beds outside. (I'm making a primrose path along the south side of the house, just under a lilac hedge.) After the transplant shock, they'll continue blooming until summer heats up and again in the fall, when the weather cools.

I think I was first attracted to these marvelous plants because someone said they couldn't be grown here in our climate and soil. They do grow best in warmer, damper climates found along the coasts both, east and west, and where the soil is more acid.

Primroses are tender perennials and as such do need a little extra care. I work in plenty of peat moss, where they are to be, and mulch with more peat moss during the growing season and into fall. This helps create a more acidic soil and holds the moisture, as well. These damp locations also attract

slugs—they like these conditions, too. To keep these pests at bay, sprinkle broke-up egg shells or sand around each plant.

In past years I've also started these lovely flowers from seed, starting them like any other tiny-seeded perennial. With Care! Using a loose, friable seed-starting mixture, fill the pots to about $\frac{3}{4}$ full, scatter the seeds on top of the soil and cover very lightly with more soil. After a thorough sprinkling of water, cover the pots with plastic wrap or newspaper, making sure the surface stays moist. When seedlings begin to appear, the covering is removed and daily sprinklings continue. Transplant outside when the weather warms, protecting with egg shells. Plants will also self-seed when some seed pods are left to ripen. Watch for tiny new seedlings in the bed.

Primroses come in many varieties, the most common being the Polyanthus Primrose (*Primula polyantha*). The Shooting Star, and Cyclamen also belong to this family, and all grow in moist, shady conditions.

Until spring really gets here, I'm enjoying the Primroses inside. And here's wishing you a Primrose path!