

SPRING BULBS BENEFIT FROM VERNALIZATION

By Tony Tomeo

UNITED STATES—Spring bulbs obviously bloom for spring. Less obviously, they vernalize with winter chill. They are seasonable about now because this is when they should get into their gardens. Many prefer to be interred into their shallow graves by Halloween. Many can wait as late as New Year's Day. If too much later, some may not experience enough chill to vernalize.

Planting spring bulbs can be ungratifying because there is nothing to see afterward. After all, they are dormant at the time. They lack foliage or any other parts to extend above the surface of the soil. They seem to remain inactive until they bloom as winter succumbs to spring. However, between now and then, they will secretly reset before resuming growth.

Vernalization is how many spring bulbs finish their previous season and begin their next. They know that it is winter after they experience a particular duration of a particular chill. By then, they should have finished all growth of the previous season. Afterwards, all new growth and bloom is for the next season. It is how they know to bloom on time for spring.

Vernalization concludes one season as it initiates another.

Dutch iris, freesia, ranunculus, anemone and common narcissus do not need much



Ranunculus blooms several months from now.

chill. Tulip, hyacinth, crocus and a few narcissus and daffodil do. Some bulbs that benefit from it get a prechill treatment before coming to nurseries. Prechilled tulip and hyacinth bulbs are sadly unlikely to bloom after their first year. They prefer more chill than they get here.

Otherwise, many spring bulbs are supposedly reliably perennial. Naturally, actual results may vary. Anemone can survive for many years, but might bloom only rarely. Ranunculus may be less perennial, but may also bloom better while it sur-

vives. Dutch iris and crocus are unpredictable. Freesia and simple varieties of narcissus are more reliably perennial.

Technically, some spring bulbs are not bulbs. Ranunculus and freesia, for example, grow from corms. Nonetheless, almost all spring bulbs bloom only once annually. Succession planting can prolong bloom. It provides subsequent phases to begin bloom as preceding phases finish. However, phases of reliably perennial bulbs synchronize after first bloom. Summer bulbs and bulb-like plants are seasonable

later.

Highlight: Ranunculus

The shriveled and dried tuberous roots of Ranunculus are not much to brag about. They look more like dehydrated mini calamari than dormant and viable spring bulbs. Yet, they somehow bloom as soon as the weather warms enough after winter. Although they need no vernalization, they need time to grow. Bulbs should be into their garden by December.

Alternatively, small budding plants will be available from nurseries after winter. They are too big for cell packs, so are mostly in four inch pots. Larger one gallon plants often have shabby foliage. Although popular as annuals, Ranunculus can be reliably perennial like other bulbs. They are less susceptible to rot if dug and stored while dormant for summer.

Ranunculus bloom is white, yellow, orange, red, pink or purple. The plump flowers have many papery and densely set petals, like small peonies. They typically stand less than a foot high, and may be only half a foot high. Their finely textured basal foliage stays even lower. It resembles parsley, but is a bit more substantial. It shrivels during warm weather.

Tony Tomeo can be contacted at tony-tomeo.com.

BANANA YELLOW (134)

By Grady Miller

UNITED STATES—Graydon Miller, now Inspector General of District 2 brought to bear all the dogged qualities developed when he roamed South Central and collected rents for a couple landlords, who use to facetiously refer to themselves as “slumlords” as every business leader always fancies looking a little meaner and tougher than they are in reality.

In his new post Miller mostly chewed the fat. He liked it there. Life was a little slower away from the hectic hub of L.A. It was a dream job because it was all about eliminating redundancies in government, and it opened up funds to promote parks, athletic fields and art centers. All the strum and drag the astrologer had foretold was so much piffle. It was a new age for Graydon Miller.

Names are people and so are dates. Joaquín Balaguer, the eternal president of the Dominican Republic was uncannily born on August 2, 1906, which had always been a source of fascination for Graydon Miller (August 2, 1962) since one cannot but have a kinship with that date. From a very early age, Balaguer also felt an attraction to literature, composing verses that were published in lo-

cal magazines even when he was very young.

And when Balaguer rose to power, students were offered books with his cheesy poems. They were required reading. Few read them, except those bombastic ass-kissers who won prizes for reciting them. After graduating from school, Balaguer earned a law degree from the University of Santo Domingo and studied for a brief time at the University of Paris.

Dominican politician, scholar, writer, and lawyer, he was President of the Dominican Republic cagily serving three non-consecutive terms for that office from 1960 to 1962, 1966 to 1978, and 1986 to 1996.

His enigmatic, secretive personality was inherited from self-preservation mechanisms honed during the Trujillo era, as well as his desire to perpetuate himself in power through dubious elections and state-sanctioned violence, and he was considered to be a caudillo. Of the mildest manners and regular habits: he would walk from the presidential palace every day to have chicken and rice soup in the family home he shared with his six sisters. This sacred adherence to routine a very Virgoan trait.

His regime claimed some 11,000 victims who were either tortured or disappeared (as a transitive verb). Nevertheless, Balaguer also reveled in taking credit the liberalization of the Dominican government, and his time as leader of the Dominican Republic saw major changes such as legalized political activities, surprise army promotions and demotions, promoting health and education improvements and modest land reforms.

Balaguer's ascent began in 1930 (before Rafael Trujillo took control of the government) when he was appointed Attorney in the Court of Properties. In later years, he served under Trujillo in various posts that took him from Madrid in the Dominican Legation, undersecretary of Foreign Relations, and later as Dominican ambassador to Ecuador and Mexico, five years as Secretary of Education at mid-century, and finally Secretary of State.

Miller took the minimalistic wardrobe—three black suits—but simplified. From his travels, he knew that blue jeans you can wear forever, you can go on the stump for a week, and in fact weeks on end, and nobody can see stains and smudges. It was a realpolitik

of fashion.

If an advisor got too close, you could smell the sweat and grunge of thousands of miles of travel by bus, car and plane. Later Miller took the plunge in and finally bought himself a black leather jacket which was out of his sartorial comfort zone. It would be decisive an accessory as the day in Sun Valley he put on that rangy cowboy hat, a gift of a student whose family had a hat-making company in Michoacán. Immediately, somebody driving past in a pickup hollered, EEEEEEE HAAA!!!!

He was on the stump at a Kiwana's Club of Pacoima meeting when somebody hurled at a raw egg along with the epithet gachupín. As the slimy egg white and yellow yolk drooled down his shiny Schott black leather jacket, the budding leader resolved to get a light brown suede vest, instead, more in keeping with his vegan image. After a harrowing look flitted across his face, Miller quipped:

“You gave me the egg, now where is the chorizo?”

It brought down the house.

To be continued...