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Invasion by tigers

Frances M. Birkett

have probably been due to soil and climatic change. The worst loss here has been the diminution of the gentians which once romped about and now, no matter what I do, just diminish or even die in the spring droughts we have had in recent years.

The biggest alteration in the garden has been due, however, to the invasion of certain aggressors. Loved and admired once but now almost feared, they grow and grow. The first is the lily of the valley. A dream corner of scents included azaleas and lilies of the valley. The latter have lost all self-restraint. They have gone over, through and underneath their partners and are marching in cohorts in all directions. The more they are dug up the more they enjoy life.

In the rock garden the dwarf evergreens which survive have settled down to becoming large bushes, knowing full well that their removal means the destruction of their neighbours and the upheaval of rocks. A tiny and treasured *Daphne x napolitana* with its long flowering and heavenly scent has become a huge bun blocking the view. *Daphne mezereum* seeds engagingly all over the rock garden and the seedlings have to be found places in a garden already bursting. But the real takeover has been by the tiger lilies. Many pounds have been wasted on lilies. Nearly all of them rot in this excessively damp corner of Cumbria but not so the tigers.

Twelve years ago I planned the garden. I spent months poring over catalogues, home-made lists, squared paper, coloured plans. Then orders were sent to suppliers from north, south, east and west and the plants flowed in. After 5 years the garden, apart from the inevitable difficult patches and the delightful surprises, was much as I planned it.

All this has changed. The garden plants have settled down to their way of life not mine.

Extensive losses have occurred from late frosts, early droughts and floods. These are expected. Other jobs have meant less time in the garden and we all know what that means. Some alterations



Their bulbils once carefully raised in boxes are dropped in abandon on top of treasured primulas, iris or heathers. Quietly and insidiously they swell and swell until they have pushed out the roots of other plants and just take over. Friends are offered the bulbils but they have no room now and how can anyone put lilies on the compost heap? The Inverewe primulas, once a lovely sight, have had to be rescued and put elsewhere which they deeply resent and now I see the tigers emerging for another attack. There can be no retreat to 'prepared positions' for these are occupied by refugees. Will it have to be destruction by fire or Garotta. Will I win? I doubt it. 🌸



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