

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



January 16, 2009

See [Photo Gallery](#) for Shobha's gardens in snow

Camellias in bloom

I hope in taking down the Christmas tree, you have loped off the branches to place on your flower beds. The branches make excellent mulch and are very easy to remove when plants start emerging at the end of winter.

I did not get a tree as we went away for the holidays. So I'm particularly grateful for the blanket of snow that is protecting the plants and sleeping bulbs. I'm wishing for a nice thick layer of snow all through the winter that will miraculously disappear around mid-March. By that time, I'm invariably fed up with it and very impatient for signs of new growth in the ground.

Meanwhile, I'm enjoying the winter wonderland. It really is so beautiful and calming. Especially in the afternoon when the low, soft light slants across the landscape. As I walk around, I shake off the snow that weights down any shrub or tender branches. Gives me a sense of having done some good deeds in the garden. When there is such a blur of white it is easy to overlook plants that are in danger of being hurt.

Indoors, I'm reveling in the Camellias in bloom. The flowers are a deep pink verging on cerise red. They look like double peonies and are gorgeous. If I

were the mad scientist I showed potential to become (my academic background is in molecular biology), I'd try to get Camellias to acquire a fragrance. They look as though they ought to exude an exotic perfume but alas, they don't. Still, their beauty is a joy and they keep me going through the dark, cold months. One of the nice things about the season is that there is the time to really observe the buds grow fat and unfold in slow motion. Nature is just so marvelous.

If you remember, I've been lamenting about the high price of good amaryllis bulbs this past season. In my quest for them, I purchased a few puny ones at the supermarket only because they were inexpensive and I was greedy. I got those bulbs going well before the holidays. They have been very slow in growing and it appears they will bloom only by the end of this month. In contrast, the amaryllis bulbs I obtained from the New York Botanical Garden shop were planted early this month and are doing so much better. They were more expensive but looked healthier. And I got them on sale. Just goes to show, you get what you pay for.

Camellias

Clustered butterflies
conferencing before
taking flight.

Ruffled wings gently
unfolding, revealing
jewel-toned red
petals soft as dew.

Serrated leather
cut-outs adorn
branching limbs.
Sturdy appliqués boldly

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competing, balancing

the still-life

that is never still.