



Sunny Italy

Lots of parts of Italy remained below freezing for two days this weekend as a cold wave came down from Russia.

Rick Gush

Friday, December 25, 2009

Photo by Juliette Hargreaves Lots of parts of Italy remained below freezing for two days this weekend as a cold wave came down from Russia.

Friday and Saturday were filled with snow in Liguria and the mountains above us are all covered in white. We even got a sprinkling of snow down here at sea level, and the garden is pretty well frozen.

The fava beans are all a bit wilted and a few of the tender plants like the hibiscus are badly burned, but most everything else looks okay. The cabbages and broccoli were all well-mulched and look as if they enjoyed the brief freeze. The kiwi vines are finally shedding their foliage, but the apple trees still have their leaves! The orange trees and the lemons are doing fine and show no signs of frost damage.

I did have the good fortune to find some excellent leaf collecting spots up on the mountain a few weeks ago, so all the beds are mulched with thick layers of oak leaves.

I'm not exactly sure of the scientific basis, but I'm of the opinion that oak leaves are the best leaves one can find for mulching use.

Somebody else must share this opinion, because I remember when I worked in the nurseries when I was younger, the single most appreciated bagged mulch product was always oak leaf mould. Even though oak leaf mould cost three times as much as the other mulching products, we would always sell a lot of it.

The photo for this week was taken by my friend Juliette Hargreaves. They live high up on a ridge of Mount Portofino and their location is usually colder than ours down at sea-level.

I've been in Liguria for nine years now, and I've only seen it snow in Rapallo three times. It usually snows up on the mountains behind us every year, but snow on our street is fairly rare.

The weather predictions call for a warming in the next few days as a storm system is coming up from Africa, so I expect that we'll have a wet Christmas rather than a white one. If we are in the mood for snow, we're only about a twenty-minute drive from the hills above where we can find all the snow we want.

Even with all the snow, I can already feel the inevitability of spring, and I'll admit that I get pretty excited.

I particularly enjoy the winter solstice in a few days, which means that the days will finally start getting longer. I'm ready for spring. I have a new coldframe for growing seeds, a new terrace ready for planting, and three of the biggest beds resting under a thick blanket of compost, all ready for the spring crops.

The big fair in Chiavari is in less than a month, and I'm really happy to be ready for a new apple tree and two new citrus. The holes are already dug and filled with compost, so I'll be able to plant the new trees in late January without needing to dig in the mud.

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