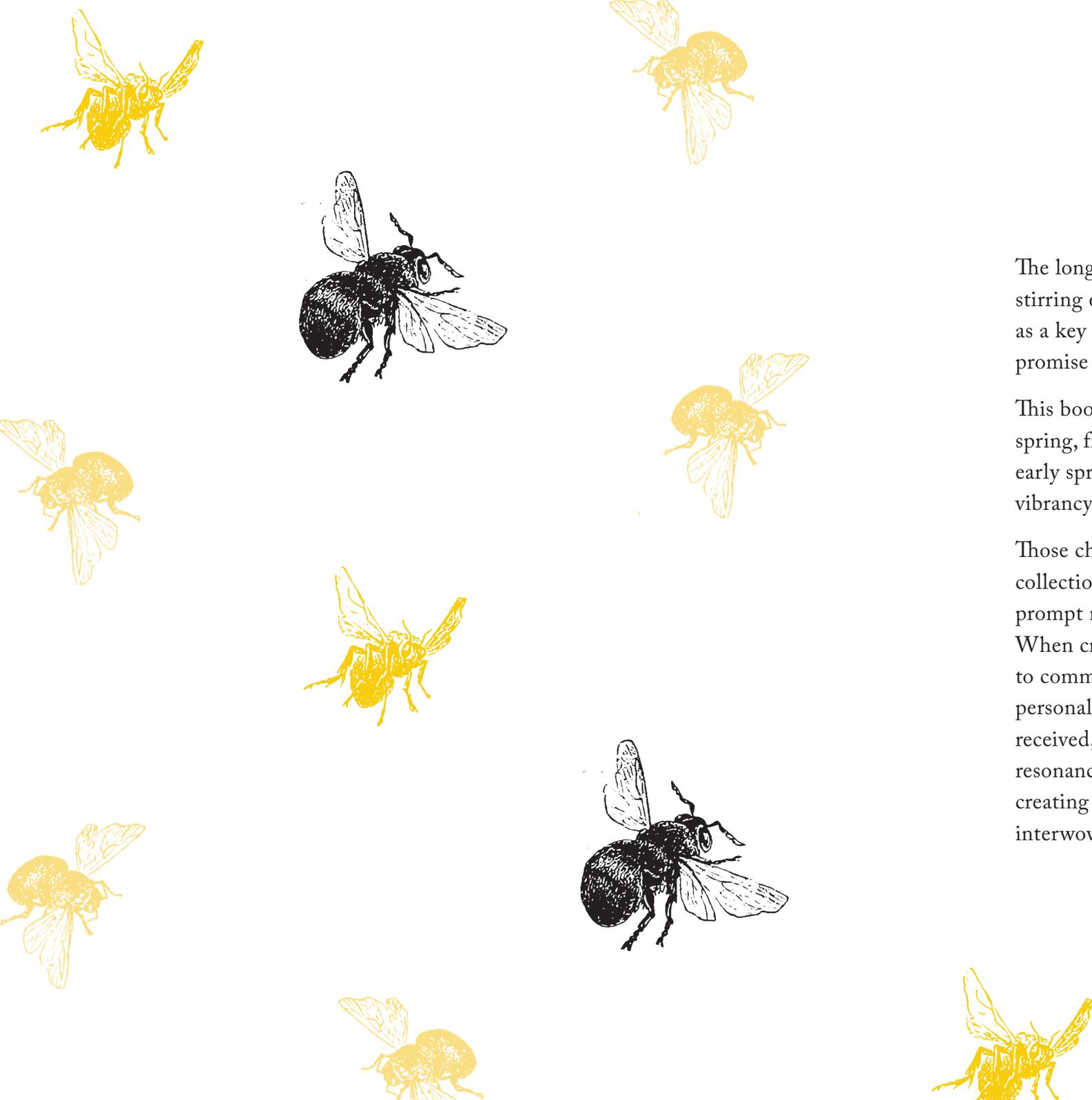


Seasons of Stories

# SPRING





The longing for spring to arrive is a strong, stirring emotion for many of us. It is heralded as a key turning point in the year, bringing the promise of new life and longer, warmer days

This book celebrates the changes occurring in spring, from the shy and understated signs of early spring to an explosion of life, energy and vibrancy in late spring.

Those changes have been captured through a collection of words, images and traditions to prompt memory, conversation and reflection. When creating the book people were invited to comment on what spring means to them, personally. Many treasured replies were received, both heart-warming and full of resonance. These have been instrumental in creating this spring book and can be found interwoven throughout its pages.



In spring we sow,  
at the harvest mow  
And that is how the  
seasons round they go.

Traditional

## When is Spring?

---

Nature stirs awake, bright  
in blossoms and first flowers,  
larks, birch, and chaffinch  
burst garden greens aloud.

Hope rests in the top fields,  
sun nods, yes, drink, refresh.  
As rain showers splash down  
hedges sing, our spirits rise.

■ What are the first signs of spring for you?

“A lifting, a lightening,  
a heartsong - that I have  
survived the cold winter  
and all will be well.”



“I enjoy having daffodils in  
the garden and the house.  
This really cheers me up!”

“Spring tides, spring in  
your step, spring forward.”

“By the time February  
comes I feel spring is well  
underway.”



# FIRST FLOWERS

In the beginning, Snow was completely colourless. Seeing all the happy hues of the spring flowers, Snow flew around asking them if they would share their colour.

But none would agree, each one fiercely guarding their own colour. Only Snowdrop took pity and selflessly offered her pure, pale-white pigment.

Since then, in mutual friendship, snow and snowdrops exist together in the earliest moments of spring, before any other flowers appear...



## Folk names for snowdrops

*February's Fair-maids*

*Eve's Tears*

*Candlemas Bells*

*Mary's Tapers*

*Naked Ladies*

Its Latin name *Galanthus*  
means *Milkflower*

*When the first green shoots  
and the snowdrops appear.*



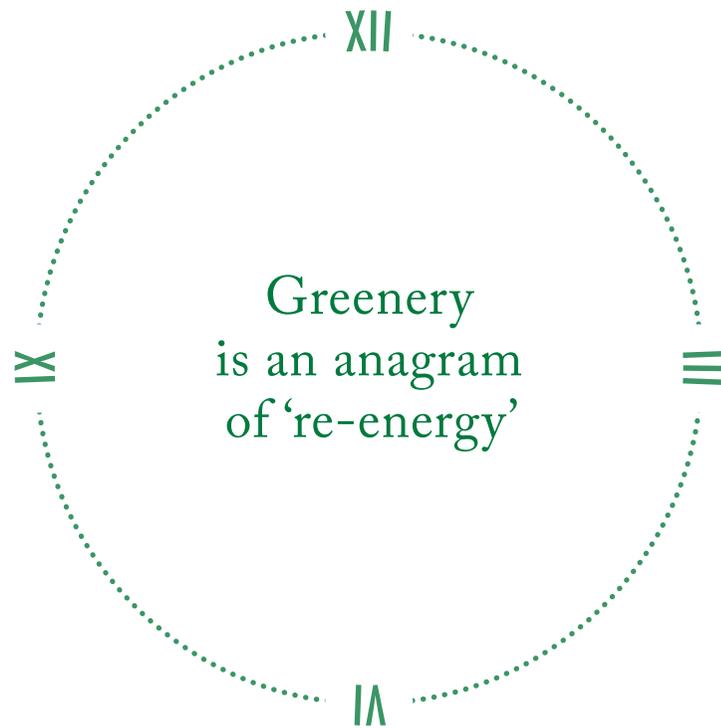
After long dark days of winter,  
tiny messengers attend -  
bells white as pale pearls  
sway on green-hooked stems.

Primrose cheer the banksides  
and the daffodils shake and ring,  
crocus wake the dormant beds  
and all heads dance in the wind.

These first bold flowers chorus  
in colours to break the frost -  
brighter days are on their way,  
our hearts too, glow and toast.

■ What does spring smell like?

# GREENERY



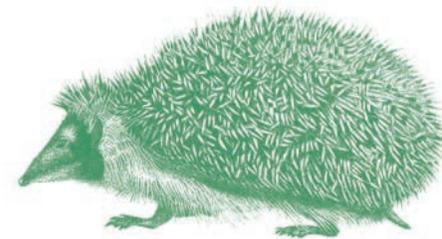
*More daylight and the promise  
of better weather.*

## Hedgerow

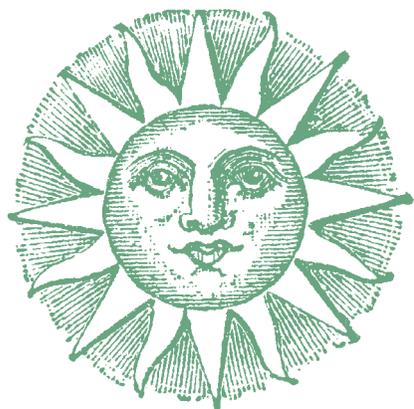
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Hawthorn, meadowsweet, dog violet,  
blackthorn, sorrel and wood anemone.  
Cow parsley, nettle, and foxglove,  
wych elm, elder and wild cherry.

When early blooms dapple old hedgerows,  
young clusters on rides and banks thrive.  
Whilst in pasture, ditch, meadow and woodland,  
all is glossed wet in wild lime surprise.



Ash before the Oak  
expect a soak.  
Oak before the Ash  
expect a splash...



When in the trees  
the rooks build high,  
expect the summer  
to be warm and dry.

■ What is your favourite spring saying,  
tradition or recipe?



The garden is greening up. The first pale leaves of the dogwood are starting to camouflage the glorious scarlet stems that have been cheering me all winter. The apple tree is full of blossom and birdsong.

## Stinging Nettle Crisps

Carefully take the top leaves of stinging nettles (from plants that are not in flower), wash, drain and dry.

Mix with olive oil, salt & pepper.

Spread out on a baking tray so they don't overlap, into the oven at 200 degrees for 3-5 minutes, until crisp, bright green and slightly translucent.

Let cool and enjoy.



*Spring makes me feel optimistic and hopeful  
... it speaks of sunshine and blossom.*

## In the Garden

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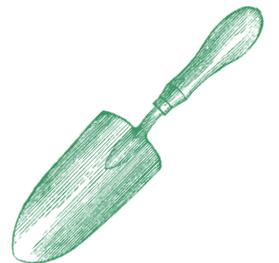
Time for the clearing  
the mowing the sowing,  
tidy the shed space  
and sharpen the tools.

Clear out old leaves,  
the old slush, the debris,  
mow the lawn (possibly)  
and hoe out the weeds.

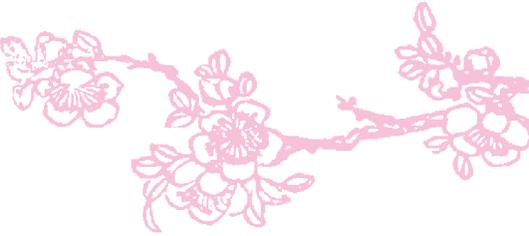
Time for the hard work,  
the pruning, dead-heading,  
time for seed catalogues,  
and bulbs and repairs.

Hold onto the patience  
a gardener knows waiting,  
the beds are done wintering,  
let seeds dream the way.

■ What do you like to grow?







## The Cherry Tree

---



Once there was a young man with a green garden. In the middle of the garden was a cherry tree, which every spring was covered in delicate pink blossom.

One warm, scent-filled night the gardener had a dream in which a loud, clear voice spoke to him: “Go to London Bridge!” He woke up startled. The voice seemed so real and compelling, so that very morning he set out for the city. In those days London Bridge was a busy place, packed with stalls and stands.

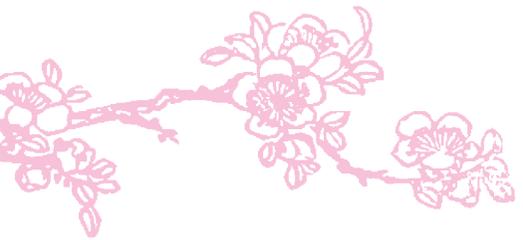
All day the gardener stood amongst the bustling crowds, but nothing happened. Then, as he was leaving, his path was suddenly blocked by a smartly-dressed merchant,



who demanded to know what business he had on London Bridge. The gardener told of his dream, but before he could finish the merchant laughed mockingly. “Ha! How foolish – it wasn’t dreaming that got me where I am in life! Why only last night I had a dream about a cherry tree in a garden with treasure underneath. But do you think I’m going to waste my precious time looking for it?”

The merchant never got a reply. The gardener hurried home as fast as he could and carefully began to dig underneath the blossoming cherry tree. Sure enough, hidden within its old roots, he found a treasure box.

*But what was the treasure inside? That’s up to you!*





“New life in nature, longer days, more to do outdoors and more smells and sounds on my walks.”

“The increase in the light and the appearance of greenery in the land.”

“It’s all about energy and optimism.”

■ What do you look forward to in spring?

# EGGS AND NESTS



## The Skylark

---

One springing morning a skylark rose up on her ladder of song above a little orchard where a pig was tied to a tree.

The old boar looked up with small, squinting eyes to grunt loudly at the frivolous bird: “Why do you fly so high and sing so loud and long when no-one down here gives a fig for your song?”

The lark fluttered even higher and replied: “I sing because it’s spring and the sun is shining. And because, unlike you, I’m not tethered to a tree...”



■ What bird song do you enjoy hearing in spring?



## The Magpie's Nest

What a clever creature the magpie is! One spring magpie agreed to teach the other birds how to build a nest...

She began by gathering sticks and stems, weaving them together into a bowl shape. A crow was watching and to this day that is how they build their nests.

Then magpie covered the twigs with thick layers of mud and smoothed the surface. A song thrush was watching and to this day that is how they build their nests.

Next, she lined the inside of the nest with soft feathers. A little long-tailed tit was watching and to this day that is how those birds build their little feathered nests.

Finally, when no-one else was watching, she decorated her nest with pieces of coloured cloth and shiny objects found on the ground. And to this day magpies are always looking for one more bright thing to finish their nest...

## A Riddle

No doors or windows  
guard this stronghold  
Yet thieves may break in  
to steal all the gold.

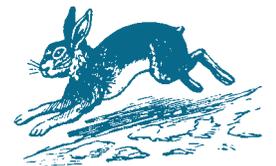
*Spring makes me feel springy, like a lamb.*

## Easter

---

Feasts after lenting,  
come leaps and fertility, something  
to celebrate, births and beginnings.

With all life a-nesting, remember  
when we met, when we were young.





AWAKENING

Which month is  
named after  
the Latin phrase  
meaning 'to open'?

*Answer: April*

■ What life can you see from your window?

“No sign of the local frog  
and newt population today,  
but a pair of collared doves  
fly in as I watch.”

“I’ve learned that baby  
starlings have pale chins, and  
that blackbirds love to splash  
in the shallows of the pond.”

“I noticed that spring was  
alive, juicy, but still the air  
was cold as a frog!”

Newly emerging fern fronds  
in spring are sometimes  
known as 'fiddle-heads'  
and 'bishop's croziers'.



## Spring Clean?

---

Work hard  
up ladders, on steps and chairs  
wash the curtains, shake the rugs  
sweep the floors, dust the shelves.

Throw out  
broken things, wear scrubbing gloves  
recycle packaging, toss out old clothes  
remove limescale from the kettle rim.

Keep safe  
old photos, laughter, voices together,  
the kindness that settles on afternoons  
when I hold onto good times, loved ones.

*Spring cleaning, out with the old in with the new.*



# RAIN

*April showers...*

## River to Sea Shanty

---

It takes a source  
to find a course  
to flow beyond,  
it takes a bubbling  
far inland.

It takes a course  
to flow beyond  
the moor to sea,  
It makes a course  
from hills and fields.

*Oh! Roll it on, carrying on with life along,  
Oh! Flow it on through rocks among  
...and we're all in this together.*



“There are stirrings  
at my feet, noises  
from above.  
Tomorrow I’ll be  
back at the window  
enjoying my spring  
garden.”



## The Willow Wife

---

Once there was a green and graceful willow tree, which grew besides a bridge over a small stream. A young farmer in the nearby village loved that tall tree. It was the first thing he saw each morning when setting out to work and the last place he went on returning home each night. Each year, in late April, he picked a posy of fresh bluebells from the woods and placed them on the roots of the old willow, a family tradition handed down from his grandparents.

One year the King sent servants across the countryside in search of timber to build ships for his navy. The village willow tree was earmarked to be felled, but in desperation the farmer persuaded them to take other trees on his land instead.

That evening he visited the willow. Suddenly a beautiful young woman appeared in front of him, as if she'd stepped out from the tree. The two talked until late in the night with growing affection. From that day they met often by the willow and, in the following spring, were married.

A few years later, the King once more demanded his tithe of timber. This time the young farmer's pleas had no effect. Soldiers restrained him as woodcutters chopped through the trunk. With a terrible groan, the willow crashed to the ground spilling its leaves like tears. In that moment a pain entered the farmer's heart and he rushed home as fast as he could. But by then the house was in darkness and his willow wife was gone...

What comes  
after rain?



CUCKOO



## The Wareham Cuckoo

---

Every spring, a cuckoo arrived in Wareham to call from the high branches of a tall elm tree. The townsfolk loved to hear the bird's two-tone tune as the herald of warmer weather and happier times. Then, in late summer, the cuckoo would fly away again with the passing of the seasons.

One year, at the beginning of April, three determined men decided to trap the cuckoo in the town, so that sweet spring would last there forever! Painstakingly they built a tall tower of Purbeck stone all around the tree where the cuckoo perched. But the foolish men didn't think to put a roof on the tower and by the beginning of July the cuckoo simply opened its wings to fly - up and out and away...

A silly or foolish person was called a 'cuckoo'

*When you hear the cuckoo shout, it's time to plant the tatties out!*

■ What does spring sound like?



COLOUR

What is the colour  
of spring?



“There are greens so dark  
that a child might say, that’s  
black not green at all...”

“The colour of new life  
and promises...”

“Greens all bursting out,  
shoots standing tall and  
proud.”



## Bluebell Beliefs

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Bluebells have long been associated with the fairies. Some people say they use them as little bonnets, others say they ring to bring the Little People together for secret.

It's always a good idea to ask permission from the Fair Folk when entering a bluebell wood. And be careful - if you ever hear bluebells ringing in the woods then you've stepped from this.

One of the Dorset folk-names for bluebells is Granfer Griggles.  
*I wonder why?*

## May Day

---

Come now you lovers,  
come all dreamers true,  
Wild dew to your faces,  
blush beauty anew.

Come dance the maypole,  
come colour the sky,  
Sing your brightest ribbons  
to pattern the days.

Dark lonely for so long,  
new lambs now among us,  
Come magic, come fire,  
come now light the way.





## What does spring mean to you?

---

I love all the Easter recipes and decorating eggs or making bunting.

The first bird, the first earth-worm...(first come, first served!)

At the end of March the clocks spring forward - time to stay out longer/later....

Hopeful and I feel more in touch with new life and exciting things ahead.

The lengthening days and warming sun hint of better days to come.

Both happy and sad. I love the optimism of spring, but it goes by so quickly!

The promise of new beginnings, of warm days ahead and joyfulness.

When the sun is shining like a golden mane and the flowers are blooming, too many to name.

The grey sky has lifted a bit and hot cross buns are in the bakery.

Spring begins on March 21st, the day after my birthday.

Flowers and plants are awakening from their winter slumber.

The morning chorus is delightful, birds are gathering their nesting material.

To see the back of winters dark and cold and the explosion of new life that spring brings.

With thanks from all the team for your contributions to give us a sense of spring for you.

*For your spring notes*

## Spring Blessings

---

May there always be work  
for your hands to do

May your purse always hold  
a coin or two

May the sun shine through  
your window pane

May a rainbow appear after  
each rain

May the hand of a friend be  
always near you

And your heart full of  
gladness to always cheer you

Traditional

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



Some helpful information  
about this book and the  
Stepping into Nature project.

[www.stepin2nature.org](http://www.stepin2nature.org)

We decided against a 'how to' use this book. It is a book like any other, for individuals and groups of all ages. We want to celebrate spring and share our favourite stories and themes. Our intention is to offer conversation starters and to stimulate thoughts, songs, stories...plus ideas, memories and joy.

Feel free to write your own spring reflections in the blank pages here.

Martin and Sarah have worked with the Stepping into Nature team and wider community to co-create the themes in this book and shape them. If you are using this book as a group facilitator or with a family member, you may develop your own personal question prompts inspired by spring.

Fair Winds and blessings,

*Sarah and Martin*

Some more poems for you to seek out

## Spring

by William Barnes

## The May Queen

by Alfred Lord Tennyson

## Daffodils

by William Wordsworth

## Spring

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

## Cargoe

by John Masefield

## Young Lambs

by John Clare

## About Martin

Martin Maudsley is a professional storyteller based in Bridport in Dorset, telling traditional tales and original stories for schools, environmental organisations and community groups. He is currently the storyteller-in residence for the arts and nature charity Common Ground. Martin is particularly passionate about connecting people and place through stories and has worked alongside Dorset AONB in breathing new life into myths and legends of local landscapes. He has also worked with Tom Hughes in creating a series of animated 'Dorset Tales' for Stepping into Nature.

Martin loves to celebrate the seasons, in old ways and new, and is currently writing a book of seasonal folktales. On May Day he can be found up Giant Hill in Cerne Abbas in the morning then performing a Mummers Play amongst the apple-blossom in Bridport community orchard in the afternoon (before retiring to the Woodman Inn!). Every spring he looks forward to hearing the first chiffchaff and hopes that the first butterfly he sees will be a brimstone – as they bode well for the year ahead!



## About Sarah

Sarah is a professional poet. She grew up daydreaming of wind-roaring skies and foam breakers crashing over the suburbs of her West Midlands home. The wilderness sea and a longing for nature always called, and after many miles and many poems, she now she lives, writes and creates events for others to explore and reconnect to the landscape and coastline in Devon and Dorset.

Spending time outdoors and on the land is an essential part of Sarah's well-being and creative practice. Sarah celebrates the seasons and nature everyday by walking the cliffs and fields alone, gig rowing at sea, and working outdoors. Sarah says that life in apprenticeship to poetry is a voyage over the oceans of myth and language, love and belonging, agreeing with Philip Larkin, "what will survive of us is love."

Sarah is poet-in-residence for the Jurassic Coast (UNESCO) World Heritage Site, Portland Museum writer-in-residence, and she works with many other museums and organisations. Sarah has worked with Stepping into Nature for two years, bringing nature connection, poetry and creativity into the everyday for participants of all ages indoors and outdoors.



# About Stepping into Nature

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Being close to nature can help boost your health, mood and build self-esteem. In short, it can make you feel better and put a smile on your face too!

Stepping into Nature works with local organisations to provide inclusive activities that help older people, people living with long term health conditions including dementia and their care partners to enjoy the benefits of nature.

Through the activities people can discover new places, learn new skills and meet others. The project also funds communities and organisations to help create more inclusive, accessible and enjoyable green spaces and train staff and volunteers to become dementia friendly.

For more information visit  
[www.stepin2nature.org](http://www.stepin2nature.org)

