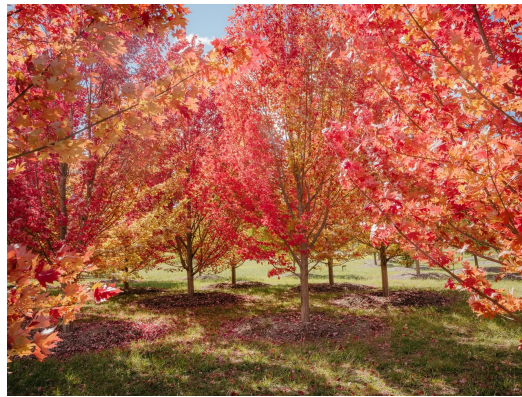


‘FOR EVERYTHING...’: SPRING’S MINISCULE BEAUTY AND FURIOUS BECOMING



“To know the seasons, look to plants. Wildflowers, especially, are excellent teachers. Their extravagant displays catch our attention. Their small, delicate bodies are beautifully, frighteningly permeable to the changing pulses of the world.

“Plants feel seasonal changes in light, moisture, and heat like few other living beings. Plant cells feed on sunshine. Water wraps every root and coats the spongy interior of leaves. The body temperatures of plants fluctuate with those of their surroundings.

This openness makes plants the primary interpreters of the seasons.”

(David George Haskell)

I sit on my front verandah enjoying a home-brewed skinny cappuccino, looking out at our now skeletal Japanese Maple tree.

Gone are the leaves—that gentle chlorophyll green sea-of-life-filled foliage, a miracle of evolution, to its chosen autumn orange and burgundy seven-acutely pointed, lobe leaves... Gone! Not an all-at-once process. But a gradual must-do life-saving transition, as its energy from photosynthesis is diverted to the roots, resulting in autumn technicolored leaves pirouetting to the ground in a light wind, to become crisp brown leaf litter and our garden’s spring fertiliser. Plop! Plop, plop!

Later, when actually sauntering in the garden, I gaze a bit more intently at the leaf litter and catch sight of a thin, grass-like stem protruding among the other assorted grasses. The stem is free of leaves but at the top is a pale blue triangular flower. Slender. Fragile. Its edges layered like fine

lace. It is almost dwarfed by the big green bird-nest fern growing along side. Is it a weed or a flower? Does it matter?

This appearance of nature's beauty—"living in the earth-deposits of our history"—is a miniscule but unmistakable announcement. The earth is waking. The season is changing. Spring is on the horizon. A time of furious becoming, beckoning us into intimate relationship. Flowers emerge not as pretty objects to be admired, but as this ravishing system of aliveness—a kind of silent symphony of interconnected resilience¹ as the poets say.

For plants, the weather, the wetness, the quality of sun, the soil its roots must probe, and whatever other biotic life is in the area—all of these together literally shape what the plant will become... All things in the environment are in constant flux...²

And again:

The demonstrative nature of spring fluorescence matches its underlying biological truth: once a plant breaks out of dormancy, there is no going back!³

So spare no lament for the autumn maple leaves... 'rainbow alleluias'. Nature is never static. Life is animate continually incarnating itself in new buds readying next spring's growth, "in microbes and maples... and human beings..."⁴ 'Johnny-come-latelys' all of us!

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We live on the third piece of debris from the Sun. A tiny world of rock and metal with a thin veneer of organic matter on the surface, a tiny fraction of which we happen to constitute.⁵ Astrophysicist Carl Sagan said it more poetically: "a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam".⁶ Scientists no longer describe the world as a fertile blend of the four elements: earth, wind, fire, and water. They talk *wonder*-fully about electrons, protons and neutrons. (And sometimes about morons!)

¹ Popova. *Universe in Verse*, 13

² Schlanger. "Memory of Winter", (2026)

³ Schlanger. "Memory of Winter", (2026)

⁴ Bumbaugh. "Toward a Humanist Vocabulary", (2003)

⁵ Sagan. *Varieties of Scientific Experience*, 5

⁶ Quoted in Popova. *The Universe in Verse*, 69

But the four elements remain the entrance to our common experiences of the ‘web’ we call ‘nature’ and ‘natural’. For we are thoroughly nature. To claim otherwise is to attempt to place human beings and everything we do in some rare unimaginable realm beyond the universe, thus rendering the power of our origins lost and our obligations vague.

Likewise our names for the climatic changes—we call them ‘seasons’, are based on the European model. Australian summer (the warmest three months), winter (the coolest three months), and autumn and spring (the three-month transition periods between summer and winter). Our religious liturgical seasons follow a similar northern hemisphere pattern. Unfortunately, they have none of the sensuous textures of a southern hemisphere landscape in them.

I have been assured the word ‘season’ comes from the Latin *serere*, “to sow,” out of which grew *satio*, “a time of sowing,” and then *seson* in Old French. Buried within the word ‘season’ is a promise, a seed. Covered in darkness, something deep within the seed uncoils, springs forth. Listening to cosmologists I also learn that seasons emerge from a planet’s axis of rotation: if it is tilted towards or away from the Sun, there are seasons; if the axis is parallel or perpendicular to the Sun, there will be none. Plus the important rhythmic companionship of the Moon.

According to some environmental research coming out of Cambridge University in the UK—they analysed records and observations spanning 250 years—spring now arrives on average a month earlier than it did in the 1980s. It found that “species’ flowering times vary most according to fluctuations in temperature” with a marked “shift towards an earlier spring since 1986”, as defined by the “springing time of wildflowers”.

Yet for many of us living in postindustrial cities and sprawling suburbs, spring is a date marked on our kitchen calendars. Result?.. There is a “mismatch between spring” as a feature of the natural rhythms of the environment on which we depend and spring as a date that we timetable. And “as most of us live within controlled interiors, where temperatures are kept at a season-free norm of around 20 - 23 degrees Celsius, complete with artificial lighting and curtains that extend or contract the hours of day and night”, our actual direct contact with ‘spring’ and the environment beyond us, is muffled.⁷

⁷ Challenger. “The Springing Time” (2026)

The changes in weather vary significantly across a continent as large as Australia. The season experienced in tropical Cape York in January is very different to January in Tasmania. Likewise, the middle of the year brings radically different weather patterns to the tropical north, temperate south and central desert regions respectively.⁸ Such seasonal naming rites of summer, autumn, winter, spring, is very ‘western’. But there is another way of talking about ‘seasons’.

Close to where I was born and raised is the Victorian mountain range called The Grampians, or *Gariwerd* in local Djab Warring and Jardwidjarli clan language. No specific names or dates. Instead their six seasons are described by what is happening at the time: for example, ‘the wattles are now flowering so we know that the eels are on the move’.

Understanding the land, the movement and activities of the animals, and the annual cycle of plants through seasonal observations, was essential to their survival. Knowledge built up over thousands of years enabled the clans to have intimate knowledge of the environment. A deep knowledge of the interconnectedness of the land and all things in it. “If we are to re-establish a viable relationship,” suggests deep ecologist Dolores LaChapelle, “we will need to rediscover the wisdom of these other cultures who knew that their relationship to the land and to the natural world required the whole of their being”.⁹

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The rise of stories with humans at the centre pushed the seasons into the background. So much so that many of us failed to notice the changes... especially the rise of climate change. Or, following the fossil-fuel lobbyists, dismissing it as a political hoax. For years, scientists have been showing data in the form of graphs of temperature vs. time, maps of sea level rise, and movies of sea-ice changes.¹⁰ The central message in all their Reports is unmistakable: governments must rally to drastically cut emissions and cease the extraction and burning of such fuels.

⁸ Gaby & Yunkaporta. “Seasonal ‘calendars’ of Indigenous Australia,” (2018)

⁹ LaChapelle. “Ritual is Essential”, (1984)

¹⁰ In January 2026 Victoria notched up the hottest temperature ever recorded in the state with the mercury hitting 48.9°C at Hopetoun and Walpeup. And in South Australia’s Renmark, it hit 49.6°C. It’s shaping up as the worst since the heatwaves of the Black Summer of 2019–20

Australia is one of the most vulnerable developed countries to the impacts of climate change and we've seen the risks dramatically escalate over the past five years. So let me plant this seed: aside from catastrophic weather events, the primary observable effect of climate change is the disruption of the seasons. Period.

Flowers blooming too early, before their pollinators have emerged.

Summers growing hotter with record-breaking temperatures.

Winters colder, with freakish late frosts.

Bushfires more often and more destructive.

So-called 'one-hundred -ear floods' far more frequent.

Climate change threatens everyone with unending seasons of loss. Professor of Religion and Social Ethics, Jack Hill, says we would do well to attend much more closely to the land and the non-human life forms around us. Nearly 20 years ago he wrote:

What might we begin to notice about the birds, insects, and plants around us if we spent sixty minutes a day looking for them as we walked to our workplaces?

"At the very least", he went on to say,

we would notice changes in the seasonal flights of birds. We would notice if the mosquito population doubled or tripled. We would notice if more and more trees had dead limbs. Instead of reading about the effects of global warming, we would notice them in our daily experience!¹¹

I continue to gaze at my Japanese Maple tree in the front yard, our environmental reality... Leaves falling too early can mean less food for caterpillars, thus fewer caterpillars for birds before they embark on their winter north-south migrations; fewer caterpillars in autumn means fewer going into chrysalis, fewer emerging in spring when a riot of kookaburras return from their nesting with young, noisy chicks in tow. How will cycle after cycle of seasonal disruption—what climate science terms "season creep"—erode our ecosystems? Will there come a day when we cannot tell what season it is? When there are no seasons to speak of anymore? When one long season of chaos descends? No season will ever be the same on a warming planet.

¹¹ Hill. *Ethics in Global Village*, 68-69

We are fully linked with our surroundings where the metaphor of ‘web’ is used to describe this interrelatedness.¹² As earth-creatures we do not live in straight lines; we truly do exist in a web, a network, a maze... When the relationality is mutually supportive, and not distorted, we truly can speak of ‘mazing grace’.¹³ At-home in the universe. Not as plunderers and exploiters of nature’s resources, “but as creatures of earth, born of its processes, nurtured and sustained by the subtle and intricate inter-change as humanly evolved organisms within this enveloping atmosphere...”¹⁴

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“For everything there is a season...”¹⁵ said a Jewish free-thinking sage—*Qoheleth*—twenty-three centuries ago as he set down his ‘empirical’ thoughts about life. Thoughts which proposed that though nature operates in ever-repeating cycles, much of human life is determined, predestined even, by sheer chance.

“Study the wild lilies and how they grow...”¹⁶ said an impoverished Palestinian sage—*Yeshu’a*—sometime between the years 26–36 CE, from the north-west corner of the Galilee. Thoughts which reveal he was acutely aware of the natural world, saturated with beauty, and embraced it in his recasted vision of life.

Comparing what each considered the best attitude to take towards the living of one’s life: for *Qoheleth* the proverbial glass was half empty; for *Yeshu’a* it was half-full.¹⁷

Our experience of the universe funds festive expression in the seasonal transformations. “These are the ever-renewing moments of celebration on the universe.”¹⁸ Such moments not only enlarge the

¹² Others have challenged this understanding because the image of a web is too meagre and simple for the reality. A web is flat and finished ‘and has the mortal frailty of the individual spider’. And although elastic it has insufficient depth.

¹³ Axel. “Reshaping... Theology”, 61

¹⁴ Meland. “Grace”, 135

¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 3:1 (*Qoheleth* in Hebrew)

¹⁶ Matt 6:28b, Taussig. *New New Testament*, 32

¹⁷ Geering. *Such is Life!* 33

¹⁸ Berry. *Selected Writings*, 179

scope of living, but “sensitizes our feel for life and beautifies its quality”.¹⁹ The ‘glass is half-full’ moments!

Brushing past one small, fragile, laced blue flower in early spring, takes my breath away! Such ‘wonder at’ gives me a little more encouragement to carry on with my own world... But for some it is difficult to feel hopeful in the midst of intensified environmental challenges and global political chaos!

Yet...to see the world synthesised in an early spring flower and the gifts of the seasons—to be heartened by nature’s resilience—is to contemplate one’s own life blended with the total movement of life, rather than participating in those activities that are fracturing them, or just staring blankly as if one is a tourist or outsider.

As a recent article in *Emergence Magazine* said when introducing a reflection by Irish author and naturalist Dara McAnulty, said:

Living within the fabric of the seasons can be as simple as noticing the small happenings and cyclical turnings that unfold each day. To move through the world with the senses wide open allows an intimacy with life that keeps the gateway between self and Earth unobstructed.

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¹⁹ Meland. *Modern Man’s Worship*, 288

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