

Notes from a Small Garden, 21 March

Only a couple of weeks ago it was as if there were two parallel universes, one out there where something called coronavirus was going on and one where life continued as normal. I was shopping, visiting and meeting friends as usual.

And now? I'm one of the over-70s endangered species, so having to adjust to the new reality of self-isolation for 12 weeks and a different daily life. How to organise shopping for food and medications? I've used trusty online Ocado for grocery deliveries for years – but try getting a delivery slot now! Instead, our fantastic local Covid-19 support group, with its zone captains and volunteers, is doing a grand job of making sure everyone who is self-isolating has food and meds, and our local shops and pubs are stepping up too. At times like this we realise how fortunate we are to have such a strong community.

How to keep in touch with family and friends? I'm lucky in that I can do email and social media to keep in touch with my family. I'm all WhatsApped and Zoomed up, and I've had more Skype chats with my grandchildren than ever in their collective lives. They'll soon get fed up of talking to Granny so I must talk to them one at a time.

How to keep busy? Instead of clearing out the sock drawer again, I'm getting to know the Green Goddess – no, not George's old tractor – the 1980s exercise guru now on YouTube. Until our supreme leader says otherwise, I go for a walk in the gorgeous sunshine and hear bird song and no traffic. The Castle Grounds are on our doorstep and perfect for a walk without going near anyone else. The days are lengthening, the sun is shining, spring bulbs are everywhere, and bursting buds on the trees are a sign that life goes on.

Most of us have gardens, however small. I've sowed honeywort, cosmos, scabious and nicotiana seeds to blast my tiny patch in the summer with colour and scent. I've started listening – really listening – to music, instead of having background audio wallpaper. I can take only so much of the daily depressing news, so how to keep entertained? I was looking forward to a trip to Berlin but online virtual tours of art galleries and museums and a shelf full of music CDs and DVDs are a good substitute. I was never a fan of cruises but do you fancy a trip on the Coronavirus Princess? (Oops, sorry, bad taste!)

I confess that I had become an idle cook, relying on ready meals and instant convenient shopping. Now everything is precious and I'm back cooking meals for my tiny freezer. I had a thought while working out how many meals I could prepare without doing any shopping: do I really need five sorts of salad dressings in the fridge? And do supermarkets really sell 60 lines of sausages? Seen from Mars, it sounds mad.

We've had 75 years of peace and growing prosperity and we think it's our right to have just what we want, right now. Is this a wake-up call from Gaia telling us to stop our selfish over-consumption and live a simpler lifestyle? Maybe it's the only way the planet will survive.

One thing has got me stumped: how am I going to cut my own hair for the next 12 weeks? Answers, please, on a postcard – through my letterbox. And a funny to leave you with: a 'Mother's Day and Gift Card in One' from my son: 'Two hours of non-judgemental technical support, extended to unlimited virtual – after all you taught me how to use a spoon'. 'Nuff said, and I can't wait to give them all a hug.

Mary Robinson
robimary@gmail.com