



garden spot

Primrose, mesclun add delights



MARTY FIGLEY

One of the very first plants to bloom in my spring garden is a lush, deep golden primrose. Each year when I check this little garden the blossoms greet me with a bright countenance that says "Yes, spring is here." They seem happy to be out in

the sunshine again.

The name primrose is *primus*, or first, in Latin, therefore *primula* roughly means "the little firstling." In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare wrote, "And in the wood where often you and I/Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie." He also considered banks of primroses as pleasant places for men or fairies to recline.

This little charmer is known in England as the cowslip, and is also related to the wild starflower, shooting star,

loosestrife and pimpernel. The family is quite extensive and blooms in the Arctic, Himalayas, Mediterranean region and, of course, here.

Flowers are single or double and bloom in many vivid colors from white, cream, pink, shades of violet and purple, red-orange and others. The center of the flowers, or the eye, ranges from deep gold to the palest silver.

Some blooms appear on tall stems, while others hug closely to the foliage, which is very similar in all the varieties. It is serrated and slightly rough to the touch with sizes that range from two inches to two feet across.

Primroses are easy to grow and need a site with good drainage, ample moisture and protection from the wind and hot afternoon sun. Soil should be slightly acidic and rich in organic material. Most prefer partial shade; deep shade inhibits flowering. Most primroses also benefit from a summertime mulch and a winter mulch such as evergreen boughs.

To increase your stock of named cul-

tivars or hybrids, divide them every two to four years in the spring after flowering, or in late summer. Seed can also be sown indoors in late winter, or in a cold frame in the spring - transplant the seedling in the garden in early fall. Sow seeds of the alpine species in the summer when the seeds are ripe, then set seedlings out the following spring.

Mesclun is a mix of young lettuces such as Bibb, Romaine, oakleaf and crisphead. Other greens are often included; the gardener can decide the amount of each. Among them are arugula, endives, mustards, purslane, chicory, cresses, parsleys, fennels, escarole and tender wild greens as well as mixuna and tat-soi from Asia and cultivated French purslane.

Edible flowers such as chive blossoms, violets and nasturtiums are sometimes included in a mesclun mix.

When buying seeds for a bright array of colors, flavors and textures for your garden and subsequently your table,



Photo by Marty Figley

Singing spring: Bright, vivid primroses announce the coming of spring.

See Figley, page D5

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