

In Praise Of Our Seasons (And Why They're Important)

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For weeks the early morning air has greeted me with varying degrees of heat – mostly warm, various degrees of cloud – mostly clear, and varying degrees of wind – mostly calm, but every day the air has brought with it the gentle caress of summer. Then suddenly, today, there is the first tang of autumn.

This little sharpness to the day is a reminder of how cyclical our lives are, it's a little taster of the promise and riches to come. It's not much, only a tiny change in the temperature, but yet it's definable and instantly recognisable. I get a real yearning, almost an impatience for each new season to begin, wanting it to rush in ahead of its time, bringing me the delights it has to offer. Each season has its own unique blueprint that marks it out from the others. Of course we get days which don't seem to quite fit, but by and large they keep their characteristics, and this is why I love our seasons. These periods of time which chart so distinctly the passage of our lives.

One of the things I love most about seasons is the way they evoke our senses. Say 'spring' to me and it's all about the sheer delight of touching those first shy little crocuses with their timid colours, or hearing the bleating exuberance of new-born lambs. Say 'summer' and I think about the feeling of wind in my hair, the tang of salt on my skin from the sea, and the gentle caress of the sun warmed air. Autumn sees me dreaming of piles of burnishes leaves, slanting sunlight on woodland walks, fat blackberries and apple cake, delicious domestic industry and colours that zing. In winter I creep out to see the miracle of cobwebs in the hedges, rush home to curl beside the fire with a book, eat buttery crumpets and gaze in awe at the first hoar frosts as the world turns to a shimmery white.

I think this is why, when I think of some of my favourite books, I realise the ones I love most, whatever their storyline, are the ones where I have felt a real connection to the mood of the book. Books where the author has cleverly used a few simple phrases to tap into my own feelings about the seasons and triggered my imagination to do the rest. By matching these feelings to the action of the story, it becomes truly evocative – spring bursting with energy, summer relaxed and soporific, autumn serene and bountiful, winter all about comfort. It's a very clever mechanism, and for me just as important as great characters and plot. Setting the mood is vital, and what better way to do it than in praise of our glorious seasons.

And if you're curious to know my favourite season then the first line of *Letting in Light* should give you a clue – *Ellie never knew it of course, but it was probably the conker that saved her life.*