

## *Primroses*

I love the rath primroses pale brimstone primroses  
That bloom in the thick wood and i' the green closes  
I love the primroses whenever they come  
Where the blue fly sits pensive & humble bees hum  
The pale brimstone primroses come at the spring  
Swept over and fann'd by the wild thrushes wing  
Bow'd down to the leaf cover'd ground by the bees  
Who sing their spring ballads thro bushes & trees

*rath*: early flowering

*brimstone*: sulphur



Like patches o' flame i' the Ivy so green  
And dark green oak leaves where the Autumn has been  
Put on thy straw hat love & russet stuff gown  
And see the pale primroses grow up and down  
The pale brimstone primroses wild wood primroses  
Which maids i' the dark woods make into posies  
Put on thy stuff gown love and off let us be  
To seek brimstone primroses neath the Oak tree



Spring time is come love primroses bloom fair  
The sun o' the morning shines in thy bright hair  
The ancient wood shadows are bonny dark green  
That throw out like giants the stovens between  
While brimstone primroses like patches o' flame  
Blaze through the dead leaves making Ivy look tame  
I love the rath primrose in hedgerows & closes  
Together lets wander to gather primroses —

*stovens*: tree stumps



*John Clare*

*John Clare (1793-1864) was the son of a labourer, and worked as a hedge-setter in Helpstone, Northamptonshire. He was also one of the most observant and finest nature poets in the English language. He spent the last 27 years of his life in a lunatic asylum, but continued to write about his life and the natural world to the very end. Largely ignored in his lifetime, he is now recognised as one of our greatest poets.*

*Devon is the county of primroses, says Fiona Stafford in her lovely recent book, *The Brief Life of Flowers*. "Mild moist weather means that the flowers flourish in more exposed sites, forming drifts of colour on the hillsides... From late March and into April, the steep banks beside the roads are cushioned in yellow and green, as if the entire county has been reupholstered in honour of spring."*