

# August Musings

Jane Allison of Mayfields Garden Plants on the joys of her summer garden



The novelist Edna o' Brien wrote about August being a 'wicked month' and so it has been, weather wise, for the garden, here in Cheshire's Vale Royal, with a pattern of heavy rain followed by intermittent sunny spells.

The prolonged Indian Summer, however, more than made up for it, and encouraged plenty of very late new growth (possibly too much if they've used up reserves which would be better kept for a new season) from newly cut back plants.

Traditionally, however, the end of August is when I sit on the bench at the top of the garden and review the successes and failures of the season.



Common Blues visited the wildflowers for two short weeks

Although the numbers and varieties of bees and butterflies were not as numerous as two years ago, when I was preparing my talk on them, I have had a couple of new visitors to the garden this year. For two short weeks I had Common Blues on

the wildflower area which I sowed in early May. I have tried this before, with varying success, but the mix of eschscholtzias, Achillea millefolium, red and blue flaxes, larkspur, Lagurus ovatus, and, in particular, Bird's Foot Trefoil, one of their main food plants, proved very popular, and looked fabulous in amongst Verbascum 'Snow Maiden', Salvia glutinosa, Potentilla recta and Phlomis russeliana in the new sunny, sheltered border. The increased amount of white clover in the lawn has helped as well!



Echinops ritro attracts bees and butterflies

Brimstone butterflies (frustratingly common in several villages within a small radius of me, but rarely seen here) paid brief visits thanks to my increased plantings of Echinops ritro and Greater Knapweed, and I had several Marbled Whites this year instead of a forlorn solitary one last year.

Only feet away from where I am sitting, the Painted Ladies and Red Admirals, who arrived only a few days ago, are feasting on 8' high cardoons and 6' high Aster 'Connie.' I should have divided the latter in the spring, as it is a big clump, so it has not had as many flowers this year, but in November, (when I am revising

this article for the newsletter) it is still in flower.

Annuals (which are great fillers for in between the shrubs and perennials) have done particularly well this year, and still flowering happily away are borage (white and blue), blood red nasturtiums, Antirrhinum 'Sawyer's Old Fashioned Lemon and Orange Mix', Orlaya grandiflora and Ammi majus, all of which have brought in lots of very plump garden bees, red tailed bees and honey bees. I sell small pots of these annuals every year, and they prove very popular.



Aster (Symphyotrichum) "Connie"

Knowing that butterflies love yellow flowers, I planted a yellow section last year, and looking at it now, the combinations of Verbascum 'Christo's Yellow Lightning' (a new introduction from Great Dixter), Nepeta govaniana, Digitalis lutea and ambigua, and Oenothera 'Apricot Delight' whose lemon blooms deepen to apricot, has attracted Tortoiseshells, Small and Large Whites, Commas and Peacocks, all drowsily browsing what's on offer. The Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns, however, have preferred the clumps of black

peppermint and marjoram in the herb garden.

There's nothing like a cup of tea and a couple of ginger biscuits to accompany a wander round the borders, while I choose my four best performers. Here they are:

*Scrophularia auriculata* 'Variegata' ( variegated water figwort), which the Americans picturesquely call 'Red Birds in a Tree', (you'll see why when you look at a picture of its flowers, which resemble tiny robins). Its wild relative grows on the bank of the Middlewich canal. Hoverflies love it.

*Diascia personata* 'Hopleys'. This really is perennial, and flowers for ever! I had a 'Christopher Lloyd' moment, and teamed its pink flowers with the large yellow and bronzy red blooms of *Helenium* 'Sahin's Early Flowerer', which, for me, is the best performing helenium .

*Phlox paniculata* 'Eventide'. Its subtle shades of violet conjure up this evocative dusky light, and it clumps up well.

*Galega x hartlandii* 'Lady Wilson' is 6' across now, and still has plenty of violet, pea-like

flowers on it. Closely planted at the base of it is a trio of *Echinops ritro*, the blue globe thistle, which, at the moment, has more bees feeding on it than any other plant in the garden.

Growing so many varieties of foxglove can be a problem if they are not labelled as soon as they are pricked out, or if labels are blown off by the wind. In May, I planted half a dozen of these 'mystery varieties' in the moist dappled shade of the house, where a leaking gutter keeps the ground damp, and these have each increased in size to 3' across. I look forward to seeing which varieties they are!

Finally, the excellent crop of 'Worcester Pearmain' apples and 'Jubilee' plums are worth a mention. I must remember to keep a bucketful of the former to put out for the fieldfares when they arrive in January.

Many of the plants mentioned here will be available on my stall at various times during the season. As always, of course, there will be lots of beautiful foxgloves to choose from, with plenty of *Digitalis hybrida* 'Polkadot Pippa' which many of

you asked for but missed out on when my stock ran out!

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