

June in My Garden

I question not if thrushes sing,
If roses load the air;
Beyond my heart I need not reach
When all is summer there.

John Vance Cheney

I cannot help but start with regrettably mentioning the "F" word. On the night of the 10th the sky was especially clear and a cool northerly breeze brought with it a light grass frost.

But above all June is the month for roses, elderflowers and honeysuckle. It must be the most scented month, even the dullest garden or hedgerow has plenty of colour and fragrance.

I have planted three species of wild rose along posts and wires like a sort of hedge. *Rosa canina*, the dog rose, has the familiar to all delicate pink flowers followed by orange flask-shaped hips in autumn. *Rosa arvensis*, the field rose, is slightly more shrubby in habit with pure white flowers, whilst *Rosa rubiginosa*, the sweet briar or eglantine, is deep pink, scented and the leaves when crushed smell of ripe apples. Against my shed grows *Rosa Russelliana*, with its very double rich purple blooms. Some of these have lighter petals amongst the dark ones, whilst others are completely pale mauve. It strikes very easily from cuttings and has travelled with me to every garden I have worked at during the last 25 years.

Right at the front of the house grows *Thalictrum flavum*, a type of meadow rue. 5ft high with soft glaucous green leaves and plumes of feathery pale lemon flowers later in the month and into July. It shares a bed with *Hosta "Lemon Lime"*. Only growing 5 inches high, this delicate-looking miniature hosta is surprisingly robust. In full sun its leaves range from the palest green to burnished gold and are quite resistant to slug damage. It has large flowers for its size, pale violet trumpets on wiry stems carried well above the foliage. A clump in a dark brown pot looks particularly fine this month. Nearby another pot-grown hosta, "*June*" has blue leaves splashed with lime, pale yellow and verdigris. It has a wonderful aquatic cooling appearance - just gazing at it on a scorching hot day will lower your temperature by several degrees.

The soft primrose flowers and grey/green leaves of *Potentilla "Vilmoriniana"* make it one of the most attractive members of its tribe, and the fact that with the minimum of maintenance it flowers from April to October makes it a first-class plant. 4 ft high and 5 across, just a light clipping over with shears in March keeps this shrub looking trim all year.

My father grew it from a cutting almost 50 years ago, since when it has moved from Kent to Sussex then down to Devon, where the old girl is vigorous, floriferous and happier than ever.

In the stream opposite the cottage I spotted a lamprey. These strange antediluvian eel-like creatures are amongst the most primitive of backboned animals, predating the dinosaurs by millions of years. The rasping, jawless, rounded mouths attach them onto fishes to feed parasitically. They have seven gill openings along their sides resembling eyes, and though once quite common now, like a lot of creatures, are much rarer and interesting to see.

At this time of year, when the sun shines we get those perfect blue and green days as spring matures into summer; everywhere looks beautiful in June, it just can't help it!

Andrew the Gardener