

In My Garden, September

- When squirrels are harvesting
And birds in flight appear -
By these signs we know
September days are here.

BEVERLEY ASHOUR

September is like April. It is a transitional month, where we notice great changes as one season changes into the next. The first of the month brought the first frost to my garden on a perfectly clear night with a gentle northerly breeze. Later on there is the autumn solstice after which night time will be longer than daytime for the next six months, until the spring solstice in March. We will see the first leaves starting to change too, yellows and oranges gradually begin to appear amongst the previously green foliage, somewhat like finding your first grey hairs as you turn thirty.

I am always rather pleased with my garden in September. There are almost as many plants flowering as in May and June, and on a sunny day the light now has that softer golden hue as summer is slipping into autumn.

A lot of the plants that flower at this time of the year are of the daisy family, Asteraceae, and I grow them almost wild amongst the grasses in a semi-natural way. *Helianthus angustifolius* has masses of rich yellow flowers 4 inches across on six foot stems, whilst *Helianthus* "Lemon Queen" is more compact making a dense clump with much paler flowers. They both resemble small versions of a sunflower. *Aster novae-angliae*, the New England aster, is 4 feet tall with light purple flowers that face upward on very straight stems. I also grow a white form of this as well as a dwarf cerise flowered variety with a long name, "Andenken an Alma Potschke". The Golden Rod or *Solidago* can become rather a weed in some gardens, but the feathery plumes of flowers are always a welcome addition to the late summer garden. All these late flowering daisies are very attractive to hoverflies, bees, butterflies and a whole host of other insects.

Fuchsias are very much September flowers, especially in my garden. They suffer so badly and almost die each winter that it takes a good five months of growing to recover well enough to start flowering again. "Hawkshead" has single flowers of a ghostly pure white with greenish tips to the petals. "Eva Borg" has very double rosy magenta and dark mauve flowers, like an overweight ballerina; my plant is a descendant of one that grew in my great-grandmother's garden. The hardiest of the all is *Fuchsia magellanica* "Riccatonii" which is the fuchsia that runs wild, along with *montbretia*, among the hedgerows of Cornwall and the west of Ireland. I grow it with *Crocosmia* whose fiery orange flowers give a bold display with the pillar box red and rich purple of the fuchsia.

Two plants that compliment each other perfectly colour-wise are *Persicaria campanulata*, which comes in pale pink and white. Known as lesser knotweed it has none of its Japanese cousin's rampant indestructibility, and is in fact a little tender. I lost my stocks of it last winter, but new plants appeared as seedlings. Next door to it grows devil's bit scabious, with its bobble-shaped powdery bluish-lilac flowers, which makes a much more vigorous and robust plant in cultivation than in the wild.

This is the season when we celebrate the summer's harvest as fields once golden with ripening grain now become brown corduroy as they are ploughed. On a personal level jars of pickles and jams make a handsome row on the pantry shelves, and give a sense of pride and achievement as a little of the summer sun and ripeness is preserved for darker, colder months; it is the time of year we give thanks to mother Nature for all her hard work and industry during the growing season, turning starch into sugars.