

In My Garden - July

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time."

John Lubbock

Talk about flaming June then along comes f'ing July! What weather we endure, day after sunless day (only a pathetic 7 days out of 30 were completely without precipitation in June) with constant stair rods of rain from this so-called "summer".

In early June the grass was cut along the sides of the lane; badly executed and poorly timed as it left rather a mess behind as well as destroying many wild flowers blooming in their prime before any seeds had time to ripen. Thankfully one plant that survived this aberration was a clump of the Bastard Balm, *Melittis melissophyllum*. The flared tubular white blooms have a bold light purple stripe over the bottom lobe of the flower looking a little like the tongue of a panting dog, a striking appearance for a wild flower. The flowers are typical of the Lamiaceae family (mint, dead nettle, sage, thyme, lavender), apart from having square stems they also mostly have clusters of pollen at the end of upwardly curving stamens that press against the underside of the uppermost petals. These pollen sacs can be vaguely shoe-shaped and my father once told me, demonstrating on a plant of Yellow Archangel, that this is where pixies hid their shoes to stop the eagle from stealing them. I have no idea whether this is a commonly-held folk myth or a fairy story he'd read somewhere, or whether he just made it up on the spot to enchant an impressionable four year old, but at that age I still believed anything anyone said without questioning. Definitely worth collecting seed from and growing in my garden.

Rose "Burgundy Ice" began flowering last month but it is only in July that it gets into its full stride and will continue on and off until October or a really keen frost halts it in its tracks. The flowers are an old port wine colour, slightly paler at the bases of the petals, as delicious looking a blackcurrant sorbet. A dark-flowered sport from the well known rose "Iceberg", try not pruning it at all. After following that advice it has burgeoned and has almost no black spot either despite being a susceptible variety and this being a bad year for that disease.

This has been such a poor year for butterflies. They really struggle to thrive when the weather is so persistently cold and wet. I was so delighted to see a Marbled ~White attracted to the many thistles and knapweeds flowering in my garden. Their caterpillars feed on various grasses and although it is called a "white" it is in fact technically a "brown" being in the order Satyridae along with Speckled Wood and Orange Tips and Cabbage Whites. According to the invaluable Oxford Book of Insects, "A completely black and a completely white specimen were caught on one occasion, and were sold by auction in 1943 for £110

All this persistent rain however has been very nourishing for many trees and shrubs and I gave certain plants in the garden an extra mid-season treat by way of a good dressing of fish, blood and bone fertiliser to encourage them to further prosper. A small consolation to me for lack of warmth and sunshine as I lie in bed with yet more rain hammering relentlessly on the roof above is that the plants are absorbing this goodness and flourishing. The weather too has made the hedgerows wonderfully verdant and over-blown as the car glides down our deep narrow lanes with pendulous grasses tickling and tapping against wing mirrors.

Oh what happened to those sunny childhood summers with endless blue sky days ?

Andrew the Gardener