

In My Garden - June

"There are moments, above all on June evenings, when the lakes that hold our moons are sucked into the earth, and nothing is left but wine and the touch of a hand".

CHARLES MORGAN

Flaming June! 2 ½ inches of rain in one day, wild, windy nights with trees down and the fire lit on several occasions. What a disappointment the beginning of this month has been, especially after those few wonderfully hot days we had in May, a taster of how charming our weather could have been.

I wait until June to plant out my garden and pots with various bedding plants. May is far too early there is still the chance of an air frost. After much success last year buying locally I have bought nearly everything from Langham where a neighbour grows a good selection of plants and will even grow selected varieties that I provide the seeds for. These plants have grown in and accustomed themselves to our fickle climate, there is no shock for them travelling to a new area with different weather conditions. Neither have they travelled hundreds and hundreds of miles squashed together and jostled about in vast transporter lorries. Grown too in recycled pots their carbon foot print must be merely a tiptoe.

If I could only have just one shrub it would probably be *Rosa glauca*. From May when the leaves unfurled, bluish slate grey above and rosy wine purple below to the flowers that cover the bush all June, single strong pink with pale centres to the rounded tomato orange hews that last from September until Christmas; it not only looks attractive but the flowers and fruits are beneficial to insects and birds. In addition to this, it is neither fussy about soil type nor aspect and requires only the bare minimum of maintenance. Another easy to grow briar is *Rosa x "Highdownensis"*. This makes a tall thorny shrub 12 feet high with stems that grow in an erect manner during their first year but by the second curve over gracefully dotted along their length with pale pinkish red flowers. The flagon shaped hews are bristly about an inch long and turn brilliant scarlet crimson in the autumn.

I grow ragwort in my garden. It is a very pretty wild flower as well as being attractive to a wide range of insects (and it annoys people who keep horses). It is the main food plant of the striking and decreasingly common cinnabar moth whose poisonous yellow and black striped caterpillars devour the leaves and flower buds. I found a few of these caterpillars some years ago on some groundsel plants I was weeding out in a garden at Upcott, took them home and for three seasons now have had my own thriving colony. Cinnabar moths about an inch long fly during the daytime and are a dramatic jet black with scarlet spots and stripes like a Spanish dancer. Incidentally, I do realise that ragwort is incredibly toxic to livestock so every year I just allow a couple of plants to grow from the many seedlings blown into my garden from the neglected fields near-by but I remove them as soon as the flowers are over before they have a chance to seed themselves and spread elsewhere.

Two gardening friends and I have started helping each other in our gardens. We spend a morning or afternoon together in turns for a damn good weeding session. Good conversation, tea and cake and a nice lunch make the hours whizz past and a boring occupation pleasurable. As well as the reward of having vast areas of your own garden transformed in a fraction of the time it would have taken alone, or seeing a kitchen garden emerge from a sea of dandelions, buttercups and stickwilly, it leaves time for more enjoyable garden pursuits such as drinking gin and tonic.

June is probably my favourite month. In a good year you get the warmth of summer combined with the fresh newness of spring. This year with the constant rain everywhere is gloriously green; the lush emeralds of the foreground fading to the soft jades in the distance. Whatever the weather June regales us with beauty.

ANDREW THE GARDENER