

In My Garden – August

“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”

Genesis 8:22

Sad to think of summer ending when it never even seemed to begin, as if spring just went straight into autumn. But the poor old garden plods on, bravely holding its head above the water and giving the best possible performance of flowers and fruits, of colours and scents and untold pleasures, though it desperately needs a good weeding.

If the climate in my garden was slightly warmer I would plant a night garden, many plants are most strongly scented at night or have white flowers and grey foliage that appears silver in moonlight. I plant several pots with *Nicotiana* (the tobacco plant with white, pink and mauve trumpet-shaped flowers), the night-scented stock *Matthiola* (with smallish, rather drab pink and lilac flowers that have the most potent fragrance) and *Zaluzianskya capensis* (the night-scented phlox whose white snowflake-shaped flowers emit a powerful sweet vanilla scent). Noticeable after even a cold, wet day, the scent from these plants after a real scorcher is intoxicating and planted in pots they can be moved about the place to wherever you decide to sit on a particular evening.

Silence is a great luxury, and by that I mean silence from man-made noises. As I sit here writing at the top of my garden I hear nothing but the birds chattering, the breeze playing amongst the leaves in the trees and the gentle churning of the stream below. In many parts of the country the noise of human activity persistently invades. In some places there are always aeroplanes constantly droning away in the skies. Even in quite rural areas there is the continuing hum of traffic and of course here we do get the noise of tractors or strimmers or other machinery (my own included), as woods and fields and gardens are working environments, but there are still plenty of times when we have this precious commodity of freedom from mankind's disturbances. Fortunately as well, unless the wind is an easterly in the valley we are even spared from the sound of church bells too. There may be times when we do not have two coins to rub together in our pockets, but we are always richly blessed with quietness. In the far, far distance a dog barks.

From the arid slopes of Mount Etna comes *Genista aetensis*, a broom which, growing up to 30ft, is the giant of its tribe. Thriving in the hottest, driest conditions you can provide, my plant struggles here, but has now reached about 12 ft high. This year it is flowering particularly well, as the airy, thread-like branches are covered with small golden flowers like a flotilla of tiny butterflies which last from July right on into September. Another plant doing especially well is a *Clematis viticella* “*Purpurea Plena Elegans*” growing up a trellis in the front of my cottage. The double soft purple-mauve blooms are 3 inches or so across and, like the broom, it has a flowering period of nearly three months.

Two large privet bushes that separate me from a neighbour when unclipped give a good display of flower starting from July and going right through August the white scented spikes of flowers are a useful way to encourage lots of insects into the garden. At this time of year tubs full of tobacco plants and an outside light left on all night attract many types of moth. This morning two hawk moths clung to the wall of my cottage. One a Poplar Hawk moth and the other a Privet Hawk moth. The Privet Hawk moth has streamlined pointed wings like a jet fighter and is one of our largest resident moths. Powerful and bird-like in flight, as well as feeding on privet its caterpillars will also feed on related species like ash and lilac.

Just a few weeks ago birds were singing at 4 o'clock in the morning. Now it is still completely dark at half past five, the cuckoos have gone and the swallows are leaving. Another summer ebbs away.

Andrew the Gardener