

## Up from Woolridge Cross

As I write this, summer just seems to be reaching maturity. I used to think that robins were the first birds to remind us of the turn towards autumn, restarting with sad-sounding twiddles of song usually around August Bank holiday, but now I realise that the persistent crying of buzzards is an even earlier signal. Is it the young ones who do all this calling at this season? They seem to mew on the wing, swooping fairly low over the trees. And there is a musical double clonking sound that I've begun to hear again, of some bird in flight: I think it must be one of the many different calls made by ravens, perhaps when they are solitary. Otherwise the birds seem still to be absorbed in their summer lull.

It's the point at which I'm always reminded that my garden belongs to the first half of the year, not the second – although this year the late spring extended June's flowers to the end of July. There should be a lesser, second flush of colour in early autumn, if the weather and temperature are kind – some of the roses my brother and I planted will have a second flowering, and there are Michaelmas daisies still to come. Some morning-glory plants are twisting furiously up their tepee of bamboos, though not a single flower-bud is showing on them yet. Despite a lot of clearing of encroaching trees, and lowering of the massively overgrown road-hedge, most of this garden will always have shade for half of each day.

But I like this resting season in its own way, and it's a pleasure to see more insects at last. There are grasshoppers in my little field, and the rusty-white buddleia in the yard has been flaunting a good population of red admirals, peacocks and fritillaries, and many bumble bees, slowly crawling from floret to floret. And I see hover-flies above one of the roses we planted last autumn, which seems only now to be getting into its stride: a deep scarlet climber with a wonderful scent called That's Jazz.

Along the garden, locked in light, no stir  
Except where scarlet in a rose, at noon,  
Throbs on the sight and overflows the flower.

Although That's Jazz was bred in Denmark as recently as the mid-1980s, it might be the very flower George Herbert had in mind nearly 400 years ago when he wrote:

Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye . . .

I think my mother must have had another poem in mind – Keats' "Ode to Autumn" – when she planted a vine on her newly built porch, sometime around 1980. Despite the long and freezing spring it is more crowded than I have ever seen it with bunches of grapes, each of which is precisely the size and colour of a pea. True to the poem, the vine does its best to run "round the thatch-eaves" – in fact, it shoots vast arms and groping tendrils in all directions – but I know from experience that though the grapes will eventually acquire a grudging tinge of purple they will remain obstinately sour till they rot in the frosts. Yet, as a symbol of abundance the vine takes some beating.

Frances