

In My Garden, July.

*Press close, bare-bosomed night! Press close magnetic nourishing night!
Night of south winds! Night of large few stars!
Still, nodding night! Mad, naked summer night!*

WALT WHITMAN

July is the month for herbs. In a wooden trough against a sunny wall parsley, thyme, coriander and dill are planted, in other parts of the garden I grow bay, oregano, rocket, fennel, winter savoury, rosemary (until a cold winter kills it), sorrel, mint, chives, sage, welsh onion hyssop and lovage. At high summer fresh herbs enliven every meal as well as giving us pretty flowers that attract butterflies and other insects, I use them constantly. There is something so virtuous and honest about a mere rosemary or sage bush; even the most meagre garden could have its patch of mint or clump of chives. Whether it is just a quick sprinkle of parsley over an omelette or a full-on pesto making session, herbs add flavour, health and a very pleasing aesthetic.

Border Phlox are coming into their own now flowering all this month and throughout August too. Cut back properly the second the flowers fade they should repeat during September. In shades of pink, mauve and white, I grow varieties that are particularly finely scented. Several good-sized clumps just grown for cutting; they make a valuable addition to a bunch of 'Queen Elizabeth' roses, which are shapely and abundant though not overly perfumed. I have one especially radiant pink, not a colour I care for greatly, far too strident and over-whelmingly gay. Its perfume is outstandingly strong, 'Sandringham' is the variety I believe. 'Omega' is a beautiful white with a pink eye, 'Prospero' and 'Cool of the Evening' are pretty shades of lilac and violet. As I write now in the middle of a sleepless humid night the scent from Phlox wafts over me through my open bedroom windows; the gentle tinkle from the stream, cool air in the depth of night refreshed and anointed with a fragrance as if distilled from the very essence of the colour "Pink".

From the start of creating the garden I left a stack of twigs and replenish it constantly as over the years it gradually decays. It is home to a wren colony that can be seen flitting around raising a couple of broods every year. Another family set up home in a wood stack right by my back door. From my chair, I can see these little titmice scuttling in and out among the logs hunting for creatures to feed their young. The fiercely territorial males maintain a constant bickering match with another wren household on the eastern boundary beyond the shed; their tuneless rapid chip-chip-chip bantered back and forth across the garden.

Wow those stipules! Walking along the lane one day a rose growing by the road screamed out to me that it was something very different. An extinct cottage has left behind its garden's ghost; in the hedgerow, blue and white periwinkle, a thicket of purple lilac and a rose are all that remain. The cottage abandoned a hundred and twenty years ago, yet still these plants persist. The cinnamon rose is an American species introduced over four hundred years ago. It is quite an unusual variety and the plant where Bissett Cottage once stood is the beautiful double flowered form. Hardly ever seen in gardens it survived here because it proliferates easily from suckers and tolerate shadier damp conditions than other types, the damasks for example, could endure. Deep purple-pink greying at the edges I discovered this rose out of flower last year merely from its infarstipular prickles alone, I can be so particularly clever, occasionally, I even amaze myself at times.

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