

In My Garden, August.

*...And the glory of spring flowers won't last forever,
and the blushing moon won't always shine, with that selfsame face:
why weary your little mind with eternal deliberations?
Why not drink wine while we can, lying, thoughtlessly,
under this towering pine, or this plane-tree,
our greying hair scented with roses, and perfumed with nard from Assyria?*

HORATIUS FLACCUS

The final fortnight in August and first of September are the peak of blackberrying season. In my childhood it signalled the ending of the summer holidays too. We would motor off with Tupperware containers, a picnic and dogs to various known places where we'd find abundant blackberries. My father would then spend that evening simmering the vast pan of purple-blackness. The familiar preserve making paraphernalia; bottles of Certo, wax discs, labels, pot covers, assorted jars warming in the oven. He tethered a thermometer, (left over laboratory equipment from his student days), to the handle of the jam pan by means of an elastic band and wooden peg to achieve a perfect setting temperature of 105 degrees centigrade. My mother preferred a cool saucer in the fridge or to observe the way the drips fell off the spoon. A battered worn copy of Marguerite Pattern's 500 Recipes for Jams, Pickles and Chutneys would be consulted, only really out of deference, they'd made the recipes a hundred times before, they could have done them blindfolded. Today this book falls open at all our family favourites; blackcurrant, gooseberry, strawberry and apricot jams; red current and bramble jellies. Each page's testament of drips and splatters and smudgy jammy fingerprints to all those batches we made. The liquid was strained over-night in a square of net curtain suspended from an upturned stool. The resulting liquor, after furiously boiling with its own volume of sugar yields the most delicious jelly. I pick blackberries here too, on good years there are enough to make a mass picking worthwhile so the huge quantities needed for a decent quantity of jam are easily gleaned. There are plenty on the garden boundary, ideal if you need a quick bowlful for a crumble. For more serious pickings then a walk along the lanes and surrounding fields is all that is needed. A modicum of effort, a degree of mess, but bramble jelly is my all time favourite preserve.

Around the year 1811 one of the first hybrids occurred between a China rose and a European one. 'Blush Noisette', the flowers are baby-pink and almost fully double appearing in wave after wave throughout the summer, never before had such an abundant bloomer been grown in the west. This rose is in the ancestry of almost every single rose we grow, however is it still as reliable and free flowering as any of the millions of descendants raised from it. Its seed parent was *Rosa moschata*, a musk rose that flowers very late in the summer. This trait was passed onto a tribe of roses known as the hybrid musks. Mostly bred by the Reverend Pemberton in the early part of the twentieth century. 'Felicity' and 'Penelope' are similar in varying pinky-peachy shades; bred from the same parents, 'Penelope' has pink hips. 'Prosperity' comes in shades of creams and whites and 'Buff Beauty' apricots. They throw up their best flowering shoots, 'Cornelia' in orange-pink, particularly good, toward the end of the month and by far better colours too than at the height of summer. Growing about as high as they are wide, these shrub roses tend to be trouble free particularly in our damp and cool climate. They should be planted more often and at this time of year make a perfect end of season treat.

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