

In My Garden, August

*Who misses or who wins the prize,
Go, lose or conquer as you can;
But if you fail, or if you rise,
Be each, pray God, a gentleman.*

THE VERY REVEREND S. REYNOLDS HOLE

Several years ago I planted Hydrangeas, taken from hard wood cuttings; they have now made good flowering sized plants. If there is a hard winter, 2010 for example, in my garden, they will be killed right down to the ground. They recover from this however but it will stop them flowering later on that year. The best way to prune them is in March; remove all the previous season's spent flower heads cutting back to a healthy pair of buds. Otherwise just prune out the older wood, three year growths and older or they will lose vigour and become unproductive and it will encourage newer and stronger growths from down below. To give them the best protection from frosts I grow them in a west facing site between a densely planted group of birches and trees on the boundary. This not only protects them in winter but also gives protection from late spring frosts that will easily burn off any new shoots which they seem all too impatient to want to grow. The foliage of birches will never completely cause total shade. However closely planted they are, my 30 trees are planted 60 cm apart in a crescent shape; no matter how tight they are there is always dappled sunlight shimmering through. Each year I endeavour to try and name their varieties. Hydrangea flowers vary so vastly depending on the age of the blooms or the PH of the soil. My soil is just the acid side of neutral; here pink, white or blue Hydrangeas retain their initial colour. In an alkaline environment the blues all turn to pinks. I once worked in a garden on the edge of Dartmoor, the soil was so acidic it was almost off the scale, every Hydrangea no matter what variety soon flowered the most vibrant Oxford blue. I'm trying to find their names; I think one is a large mop headed variety called 'Vicomtesse Vibraye'. They are the most tediously difficult plants to identify, little wonder their local name is Changeables.

Rosa roxburghii is in fruit now. Called the Chestnut Rose for good reason the rounded hips are covered in masses of tiny prickles. Very unrose-like, the leaves are composed of up to 19 tiny leaflets and very attractive peeling bark, the growth is far more angular and shrubby than any other rose. In fact so unrose-like is it that it is only on the cusp of being a rose, on the borderline of being given its own genus, Platyrhodon. The flat single flowers are pale pink darkening at the edges opening during June and have an ephemeral beauty lasting a day or so. The fruits become yellowish as they ripen and fall off all together often in the space of a day or too. These hips have a pleasant fruity smell, in its native China they are made into a delicious wine.

Walking around the Flower Show this year I heard comments such as: I've got, dahlias, roses, sweet peas or potatoes, onions, beans etc at home as good as that! Maybe you have; but, these people have bothered to enter, to prepare and display the flowers or produce they've worked so hard to raise. I'm always astonished at the high standards of the Flower Show coming from small villages of around 1,000 people. Not just horticulturally, but the general overall high levels of craft and artistry. It's something that Dolton and Dowland should be very proud of.

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