

The History of the Cottage Garden

What picture do the words 'Cottage Garden' bring to mind? Words like 'Romance' and Nostalgia, the image of a thatched cottage with wisteria growing up the walls, and a dove cote, masses of informal, free flowering colour. Well, the place that it all started, couldn't be further from that image.

We need to travel back in time a long way. Not pre-war, or pre-Victorian, or even pre-Elizabethan, we need to go back to the 14th century.

Pre 14th Century **Feudal Lords**, Serfs, Outlying dwellings, returned to castle or fortified manor at times of trouble. Only planting outside of fortification – **Orchards**, which were often destroyed. The safest places were **Monasteries** with **monastic physic gardens** and **herbariums**. Strip lychets. No individually owned land for serfs. Payment to Lord of manor for rent by way of days worked on manorial lands and tithes of crops to the Lord. Anyone needing medical care needed to call on the monasteries for herbal remedies, many of which are increasingly, returning to popularity.

1349 **Black Death**. 1/3rd of population died in one year. By the time the plague had run its course, in some places, more that 80% of the population had been wiped out. And not just the lowest classes, the plague showed no class boundaries. First time, labourers had power to determine their own future.

Post 1349 **Too much land**. Insufficient number of workers. Survivors of Black Death took over unused lands. Formation of first privately owned homesteads. First cottages built on own land, and buildings were created from whatever building materials were available, so in the highlands of Scotland the normal was granite and slate, on chalk downland, flint, Locally for us, Ham Stone. In areas where there was no good building stone, mud and cow poo mixed made a very effective building material built onto a timber framework. The wattle & daub buildings in The Shambles of York and the city of Lincoln are world famous.

With the loss of the organised social framework of the pre-black death era, each homesteader had to fend for himself. Generally, they laid claim to whatever land they needed to grow sufficient food to sustain their own family. The knowledge of herbal medicines was far greater than it is today. Today, if we have ants crossing our threshold, we rush for the ant powder. Too many flies in the house, get the fly spray. How many of us know that Great Yellow Loosestrife will control flies in the house? What on earth does that look like? Where on earth can we get some? Each family unit grew the endemic herbs along with their vegetables and of course, keeping of bees was essential.

The garden was used entirely for growing medicinal, culinary herbs, flavourings and perfume plants. (No sanitation. Very smelly) Don't forget we are looking at 1349, and what we have is the cottage, with vegetables and herbs in the garden. Historians have recorded the custom of posh ladies wearing Pomanders containing fresh herbs around their necks to guard them from infections.

Recorded vegetable plants: Parsley, Fennel, Garlic, Onions, Leeks, Pepper, Beans, Thyme, Cabbage, Kale.

Supermarket Shopping

Today, everything we need can be purchased under one single roof. In 1349, there wasn't a single shop available for those folk living in the countryside. Now communal homes had gone, homesteaders had to travel many miles to find the medicinal herbs. Records exist that show cottagers grew not just culinary herbs, but most of the medicinal herbs to cure most common complaints

1440. A hundred years on, and things have moved on in a very gentle way. **First flowers recorded in gardens, not grown for beauty, but for flavourings** included Clove-scented Pink (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) used to flavour drinks, Cowslip and primrose (Wine). Paeony (Condiment made from seed). Violets (flavouring) Periwinkle, Lily,

Rose, Foxglove, Pimpernel, Hollyhock, coriander. Madonna Lily and *Lychnis chalconica* brought back by the Knights of the Crusades in the 12th century.

Many of these plants also had the benefit of having aromatic elements that could be used to improve the aroma of the house, or distilled to make 'Sweet Waters' or 'Toilet Waters'

Dried herbs were strewn over the floor, - strew or thresh - to sweeten the houses which had no proper flooring so apart from anything else, were damp and musty. Plants recorded for this use include: Meadowsweet, Wintergreen, Southernwood, Wormwood (used to dispel fleas), Hyssop, Rue, Sage, lavender, *Sedum rhodiola*,

At this time, the cottagers garden was there to serve a purpose far more basic than the pure beauty of the flowers, but undoubtedly, any observant gardener would have brought home anything that might have seemed to be rare, or different, so new endemic varieties would have been introduced into the garden. In our field, we have a small clump of very attractive double-flower buttercup. If buttercup had been one of those plants, I certainly would have brought that double home.

Early 1500's

Some specialist plants are now on record as being grown in the Cottagers Garden. *Prunella*, (All-Heal) whose leaves were found to heal serious skin wounds, Winter Savory, whose leaves bring instant relief to wasp stings, *Verbascum* from which a chest remedy was made, and Poppies, the juice of which was rubbed on the nipples of breast-feeding mothers causing the baby to get a good nights sleep. Woodruff leaves placed between the pages of books stopped them from developing a musty smell, Great Yellow Loosestrife, dried and hung from the ceiling would dispel flies, the leaves of *Mullien* was used as a liner in childrens' shoes as well as being soaked in tallow and burnt as a crude candle. The petals of wild rose and the root of *Sedum rhodiola* were distilled into a toilet water, while woody shrubs like Cotton Lavender and rosemary could be grown as a low hedge to protect other plants in the garden.

Migrating flowers

Every part of the garden was expected to contribute in some way to the gradually improving conditions of the countryman's life. But even now, there is no record of plants being grown by the lower class country cottage gardener purely for their beauty, but it would almost certainly be the case that following the Black Death, there would have been many manorial gardens left empty, and rarer plants probably migrated to the cottage.

Late 1500's

We now start to see the first flowering plants being introduced into the gardens : *Hyacinths* and *Colchiums*, *Auricula* and *Erythroniums*, Larkspurs, and the first record of the "Chequered Daffodil" – *Fritilaria meleagris*, Now, coinciding with the explorers travelling the world, plants were arriving, no doubt for the wealthy and royal gardens, but plants do have a habit of 'escaping' The gardens of Britain took a giant leap forward with the explorations of John Tradescant and later, his son of the same name, possibly two of the greatest plant hunters in History. He introduced the Tulip from Turkey. He led expeditions into Russia, and most importantly, the New World of Canada and America. Many cottage gardens have *Tradescantia virginiana* varieties growing in their garden. A direct result of John Tradescant bringing back into the UK plants from across the world. These include the first lilac, gladioli, lupins, the pomegranate, the hypericum and many crocuses.

***Tradescantia

Our nursery sells more than a dozen species directly attributed to the Tradescants including *Tradescantia* and *Smilax racemosa*

With the new culture of the Tudors for design, symmetry and organisation, the first records now appear of gardens being divided and organised using low clipped hedges of Lavender, Box, *Santolina* and Marjoram to separate beds. This new style reached even down to the lower classes and their cottage gardens. 'Knot Gardens' became very fashionable with highly intricate designs being created in even the smallest gardens.

Key Date 1621	First botanic garden established in the UK at Oxford.
Mid 1600's	Up till now, with very few exceptions, most decorative flowers in the cottagers gardens were within the colour range of blues, purples, yellows and whites. One very good reason for this is because flowers in the garden had to earn their keep. It was well known even then, that bees are 'Red Blind'. Unlike us, who can see ROYGBIV, bees see OYGBIV&UV, they cannot see pure red. For this reason, there was no incentive to develop red flowers. The plant hunter John Tradescant journeyed to the New World bringing back fantastic new plants from America and Canada. Now perennial asters, Solidago, Helenium, Rudbekia and Michaelmus Daisies were available to the rich. Not only did this bring a wealth of reds into the garden, but for the first time, late Autumn flowering was available. Hunting in Mexico, they brought back Dahlias, China and Japan gave us the Chrysanthemum.
Bee-keeping	While we are looking at bees, it's worth noting that today, we have a range of different styles of hive. The most common in use by serious beekeepers looks like nothing more than a set of boxes placed on top of each other. The gardener who keeps bees normally prefers to use what is called a WBC hive, one of the earliest of the modern hive designs is one called The Cottager Hive. All these hive have a way of extracting the honey without risk to the bee colony. But throughout history until the early 20 th century, bees were kept in '~Skeps~'. A skep is nothing more than a woven basket. Placed upside down, the cottager would put some of last years honeycomb in the skep which would attract a passing swarm. At the end of the season, the bees were destroyed to get at the honey. If the cottager failed to attract a swarm early in the year, they went without any sweeteners for the whole year. If you watched 'Larkrise to Candleford', a powerful element of the series was based on the theft of a skep of bees and the subsequent outcry.
Early 1700's	The Linnaean system of nomenclature was developed so the naming of plants became universal.
Mid 1700	With Charles II arriving on the throne, and even more so, William and Mary, the royal gardens, and those of the nobility and wealthy, now took on the vogue of the French and Dutch highly formal gardens, as seen in Versailles and Malmasion. But the cottage gardens of the villages and country gardens reverted back to the much more free and natural look. The vegetable garden was now screened off from the flower garden, and although all the new flowers arriving in Britain were for the rich and influential, as has always been the case, gradually, the cottagers benefited from 'escapees'
Late 1700's	Bedding was now the 'in thing' with the rich, along with the more difficult exotic plants such as the Date Palm, Banana, Mimosa, Pelargonium etc. coinciding with the exploitation of the East Indies. Of course, these plants needed winter heat, and greenhouses, and for the first time, there was a real division between the wealthy and the commoner. The first 'Orangeries' were now recorded, and as very high taxes were placed on glass, exotic plants remained in the gardens of only the rich. The cottager had no way of providing the environment for these more exotic plants, and as the industrial revolution progressed, the wealthy and the nobility turned away from those plants that the commoner grew. The old favourites survived only in the gardens of the countryman (again).
Carpeting Herbs	Carpeting herbs and plants were by now a very popular addition to the cottage garden. The need to cut and trim just once or twice a year, their seeming ability to withstand constant wear and tear from passing feet, and the scent given off – not just in the garden – but also brought on into the house. Perhaps the one we know most might be Chamomile, but also included many species of Thyme, many of the mints, Mentha pulegium or Pennyroyal, Anthemis, Calamintha, Dianthus, Sedums, micromesia and Glechoma.

- Early Victorian** At the height of the industrial revolution, a law was passed making it a legal requirement for every council to provide allotments for the working class. This freed up the gardens to grow flowers for many who until now had been forced to have to supplement their meagre earnings by growing vegetables. Now many more gardens took on the style of the cottage garden. Throughout the Victorian era, plant breeders were introducing thousands and thousands of new varieties. For the first time, many of these new varieties were being made available to the cottage gardener directly, rather than they having to wait for years and years for the innovative and 'new' discoveries to filter down to the common man, or for cuttings and roots to slip out from the "Big House" and find its way to the cottage garden by the back door.
- Whenever a war involved Britain in foreign fields, new plants came back with the returning soldiers. As far back as the Crusades in the 1100's, in Turkey and the middle east, Crimean War in southern European Russia, Boar War in South Africa, – what a wealth of plants came back from Southern Africa.
- Mid Victorian** For hundreds of years, the cottage gardener in the countryside had grown out of necessity and played catch-up with the rich, wealthy and titled gardeners of the towns. Now, things had changed. The gardens of the countryside were clean, rich in humus, and grew plants well and healthily. The polluted and grimy cramped town gardens and yards, along with the new chlorinated waters meant that the town gardens simply couldn't compete with the countryman's garden.
- Welwyn Garden City** A new innovation in housing had started to appear in the New-Towns like Welwyn Garden City and Bourneville, built by philanthropists to improve the living conditions for towns-folk. But, in the countryside, a new pride and enthusiasm developed, and in this environment, names like George Russell came to the fore. Today, we don't think of a lupin without putting Russell in front of it. But George Russell only had a small cottage garden in which he developed his lupin strain.
- W.J.Unwin** a grocer discovered a sweet pea that rivalled the best that the breeders could produce, but his sweet pea grew true from seed, and it was from his cottage garden that Unwin's seeds came into existence.
- Henry Eckford,** in his cottage garden, developed the sweet pea that produced four blooms on long stems rather than the usual two blooms on short stems.
- David Thomson,** another very familiar name discovered the most spectacular stock growing in his cottage garden. Were it not for his enthusiasm, all scented stocks would have been lost to us. And of course, we all recognise the name Thompson in relation to seeds
- Groves of Bridport** was yet another famous seed merchant setting up shop in Dorchester where he sold his seeds and plants in season.
- Scotts of Merriott** have been in existence since the 1600s and were the very first plant growers to use the word 'Nursery' in relation to plant growing.
- Art Nouveau** In the last few years of the 19th Century and the years before the Great War a style known in the art world as Art Nouveau complimented the Cottage Garden theme. Masses of colour and informal planting, flowing lines and a style that suited the Cottage Garden helped to fix the style we know of today firmly in our understanding of gardening.
- 1914 – 1918** The Great War. Man-power was no longer available as every able-bodied man was called into the services. Within just a couple of years, what was space for growing flowers had, in many regions, become extensions of the allotment. Flowers were dug up in order to grow food to feed the family. My own Grandmother told me stories when I was a lad of how, during the First World War, while her husband was fighting in Europe, she spent her time growing veg. in what had been a wonderful cottage

garden. How she was tending to the food crops when she got news that her husband, my Grandfather had been seriously injured fighting in France, and at that time, was expecting her third child, my Mum. It was possibly because of the tales she told me, that I took an interest in the flower garden. It was because of her determination to restore her garden to its pre-war glory, despite the fact that her husband had lost 1½ legs, and her spending the rest of her lifetime keeping that garden looking like something off the front of a chocolate box, that I still have memories of what a cottage garden should look like.

Art Deco

Following the Great War, life returned to normal, Art Nouveau led on to Art Deco with much harder lines and geometric designs. This popular change in current styles was reflected in the designs of many gardens, which now often included more hard landscaping and the addition of 'inorganic' elements in the garden. Many new plants arrived in this period, possibly reflecting the fact that most families had at least one man who had been in Europe fighting, and had seen these southern European plants growing wild.

Garden flowers thrived during this time of economic plenty

Great Depression

Then came the financial crash and General Strike of 1926, 'the Great Depression' and the repeat of what had happened two decades previously threatened the cottage garden. Another round of digging up the borders and replanting them with vegetables. It seems that what gets grown in the garden is a social barometer. . Flowers during the good times, Vegetables – of difficult times. "At times of national stress we turn to dirt."

Second World War

By the end of the 30's Britain had been drawn into the second World War. Land Girls, Dig for Victory, Turn your garden into your Corner Shop. From a purely gardening point of view, the net result of the 'Dig For Victory' campaign was the loss of many great names. Even today, a look through the RHS Plantfinder will reveal that either old favourites are now completely missing, or are available from just a tiny handful of nurseries. The cottage gardens of this country had been dug up and replaced with vegetable beds. Many varieties of plants had gone to the compost bins. We are trying to find varieties that I know my Grandmother grew 60 years ago. Her garden notebooks listed names that have gone for good.

I cite two examples. Kniphofia Bee's Flame and Bee's Yellow. Both Giant varieties of Red Hot Poker. Sadly, as a direct result of the Dig for Victory campaign during the second world war, the two varieties were very nearly lost forever. Currently, RHS Plantfinder lists just one supplier for each. We've managed to find Bee's Flame, but not yet Bee's Yellow.

Following the end of the 2nd world war, many new varieties appeared in the retail markets. Quite probably, specimens were brought back to Britain by the returning forces, then following enough time to propagate stock, they would have been available to the new 'Garden Centres', but before we look at that, lets look at another effect of the 2nd world war.

Prefabs

The austere years of the post war decade saw great numbers of prefabricated houses being erected in the suburbs of most towns. Building materials were at a premium, our housing stock was totally inadequate, so prefabs were built, each with a small garden, and each one looking the same as the one next door. The cottage garden gave the inhabitants of these prefabs the opportunity to create an individual home at a very low cost, and as a lad, I can remember the cottage garden of my aunty. Spectacular with climbers covering the walls, and even the railway embankment at the end of her garden sported an extension to her garden.

Arrival of new varieties

Buddleija davidii	'Peace'	1945
Buddleija davidii	'White profusion'	1945
Cornus florida	'White cloud'	1946
Rhododendron	'Saffron queen'	1948

Ditto 'Tortoiseshell Orange' 1945
Ditto 'Matador' 1945

Re-discovery

The years that followed the 2nd world war saw massive efforts being made by various groups to rescue and re-discover the great varieties of history, and it was to the countryside, and the cottage gardens of the countryside, that the new plant-hunters turned. Organisations like "The Hardy Plant Society" were instrumental in this new wave of what some would call sentimentality, others would call saving tradition for posterity. Among the benefits of HPS is their annual 'Seed Distribution' where every member has the opportunity to obtain many seed varieties each year which are listed just one or two times in the current RHS Plantfinder.

Wyevale

During the 1930's, Harry Williamson, a small time nurseryman and rose grower, travelled to the USA where he saw a great new innovation in retail plant sales. This was the introduction of black plastic pots to sell plants in. Until now, most plants were sold bare-rooted or as seeds, and only at appropriate times of the year. Clay pots were available, but being heavy, fragile and difficult to travel, only expensive plants were sold as potted plants. The introduction of cheap plastic pots meant that plants need never see a bed of soil, but could be grown from scratch in plastic. Williamson came back to Britain, and in very little time, had found a plastics manufacturer, and after a few failures and trials, was in full production. The war years came and went, then in 1962, Wyevale garden centre was born, and so was the whole concept of Garden Centres.

Black Plastic

Today, we take plastic pots for granted, but from the point of view of the history of plant species in this country are concerned, there was a negative effect. Black plastic pots have particular disadvantages. They dry out quickly, they get extremely hot, they are light, so get blown over in the wind. These difficulties led garden Centres to drop many of species which were difficult to grow in these plastic pots. The range and choices available to gardeners rapidly reduced. Some of these 'out of favour' plants only survived in the old cottage gardens, so the Cottage Garden has become a living museum for many plants.

Need for Profit

In our current commercial world, the entire emphasis and drive for many businesses is the need for profits, - big profits. As a continuation of the reduction of available species, many traditional cottage garden plants are no longer available at garden centres because of the cost in labour to maintain them. In one of the big garden centre multiples in Bournemouth, you can't even buy Lupins because they require daily watering, and sometimes, watering twice a day. You can, however, buy any number of phormiums. So once again, the cottage gardens are the places where many old varieties are being saved. A visit to our nursery will normally see many of these difficult plants. Not because we are good at growing them, but because my aim is to be able to offer all the plants on my grannies plant list. So yes, we do have Lupins. We also have *Aristea major*, and *pulmonaria angustifolia*.

Cottage Garden? What is it?

We've travelled through quite a few hundreds of years, and as you can see, there is no single point in history which defines the Cottage Garden. From growing endemic species of herbs to save time having to go out to forage for them, through collecting unusual species of herbs, growing a few flowers, separating the veg.-plot from the flower bed, creating a style that rivals any formal garden for beauty and colour – the style of the cottage garden has evolved through the centuries. From mixed veg and flowers, through knot gardens and box gardens, art nouveau and art deco, vegetables growing in flower beds and flowers in vegetable beds.

The Cottage

In the past, by its very definition, the cottage garden required a cottage. Country cottages were, until the 19th century, built of whatever material was available locally. So in chalk downland, cottages would be built of flint. From West Dorset to the Yorkshire coast - limestone. In areas of clay they would be built of cob and thatch and where available, in moorlands, granite, and in mountains – slate. But since the introduction of mass-produced brick, there has always been a desire to mimic the

cottage garden which seems to be timeless and tireless. Having said that, I believe it's wrong to suggest that a particular idea or design is not suitable for a cottage garden. This is because throughout time, the cottage garden has attempted to be as modern and up to date as possible. It is only because we seem to have a nostalgic view of a single moment in the history of the garden. But the Cottage Garden has been a changing reflection of life in the countryside.

Definition !

So in answer to the question – What is a cottage garden?, today, one definition of the cottage garden is one that draws on nostalgia for ideas. It's full of colour, incorporating the old traditional favourites and the modern varieties. Roses and honeysuckles that have their origins in the UK along-side peonies, pinks and wallflowers from southern Europe, oriental poppies from the far east and asters and rudbeckias from America. And alongside these old traditional plants, new and exciting discoveries and varieties available today. There is no problem with visiting Chelsea or Hampton Court Flower Show and planting the very best of what's new.

Quote.

Perhaps one of the most well known supporters of the Cottage Garden was Gertrude Jekyll who wrote "I have learnt much from the little cottage gardens that help to make our waysides the prettiest in the temperate world"

Quote

William Robinson wrote "English cottage gardens are never bare and seldom ugly..... among the things made by man, nothing is prettier than an English cottage garden".

What makes a cottage garden.

Wall and Gate

It is very fortunate that you don't need a traditional cottage to have an traditional Cottage Garden. But looking back to even the Victorian times for ideas, much of our country had extensive areas of common land where country-folk could pasture their animals. Even today, most countryside has a problem with wild deer roaming, so one of the essentials of a cottage garden is a stock-proof boundary – be it a stone wall, high hedging or picket fence, and there's little point in having a stock-proof boundary fence without having a gate to let you in and keep them out.

Culinary Herbs

Traditionally, near the kitchen door, herbs would normally have be found growing. So Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme along with Bay, Chives and Marjoram should be found.

Freshening plants

The plants that where used to bring a pleasant aroma into the house were there, so Roses, Pinks, violets and any richly perfumed flowers should be readily available for picking.

Medicinal plants

Medicinal plants should be available. These can be as simple as the primroses and as effective as valerian. And even though many of the medicinal values have been all but lost to most of us, the cottage garden holds on to the tradition. Plants grown for high days and holidays, so angelica which was candied and stored for special occasions and holy, ivy and mistletoe could be added to the garden if space permits.

Fruit Tree

The traditional Cottage Garden would have had at least one or two fruit trees, perhaps an apple and pear, so the basic ingredients for chutneys were there

Vegetables

And of course, there really is no problem with growing vegetables among the flowers, so having onions and garlic or lettuce and radishes are quite acceptable among the flowers. Personally, I think it's taking the Micky out of us for garden centres to sell 'ornamental cabbages' for the flower border. Whats wrong with the real thing?

- Summer-house** In the south of the British Isles, the concept of a 'summer House' is fairly new, but in many regions in the North of England and Scotland, a Summer-house has been part of the Cottage Garden for a great number of years. In the Autumn, Winter and Spring, it may be the only way of enjoying the garden.
- Topiary** Although it was the gentry and royalty that introduced topiary, the cottager was equally adept at creating amazing shapes out of box and yew, and it really was not out of the ordinary to see brilliantly crafted topiary shapes in the cottage garden. Don't forget, that during the days when Art Deco was the vogue, hard sculpture was quite acceptable, so why not a few bits and pieces in the garden.
- Garden Seat/Arbour** In the days before television and internet, and before electric lights there was little to entertain the cottager after a days work. So a garden seat often surrounded by an arbour and facing west was a common feature in the garden. What better way to end a day than to sit and watch the sun go down on a warm summer evening with a glass of ale to wash the dust away?. Then, if that arbour is the framework to grow honeysuckles and roses, you have somewhere to sit in cool shade from the hottest part of a Sunday afternoon.
- Height** We all have a desire to show off to passers-by, and that's nothing new, so as climbers – Jasmine, Roses and Wisteria became available. These were grown in prominent areas of the garden to adorn the walls of the house. Larkspur, Delphinium and Lupins and when available, *Ligularia prizwalskii*, gave height, and visibility to the garden.
- Trellis/Screening** The 'dunny' or toilet was outside, this gave another opportunity for the cottage gardener to grow more screening plants, and even after we all had centrally-heated indoor loos, there has, since medieval times, been the need for an outbuilding to store garden produce and 'stuff'. The cottage gardener has since Victorian times separated the vegi-plot from the flower garden. The outbuildings were and should be softened by planting suitable screening plants. That goes for the compost bins too.
- Bee-awareness** Do bear in mind that the cottage garden is a very 'fluid' concept, often listening to and responding to current changes. What was the 'in thing' 15 years ago? Charlie Dimmocks Water Features, 10 years ago? Specimen grasses. Five years ago? Global warming, water shortages and 'Dry Gardens'. Today, Patios are out, but there's barely a week when our bees aren't in the news, so 'bee-friendly' flowers and nectar bars are the new 'in'.
- Masses of Flowers** Perhaps the one thing that the Cottage garden lacks, is visible soil. Throughout time, as the cottage gardener acquired a new plant, he or she was always able to find space to squeeze it in.
- What about the future?**
- More Vegetables** I said earlier 'in times of difficulty, we turn to dirt' Over the next few years, we are likely to see an increasing trend towards growing vegetables. In years gone by, we turned to the allotment, but at present, this country is losing allotment space at an alarming rate. The only way we can grow veg without allotments is to dig up the flower gardens. The current media pressure to 'Grow your own' puts even more strain on the flower border.
- More Pests** With the loss of so many of our chemical herbicides and pesticides, and a move to grow organically, there will be a trend to drop many of the more difficult species and varieties in favour of the more easily grown varieties. As the climate warms, we will see an increase in the number of unusual plants and worryingly, pests, along with an ever decreasing means of control, so yet again, more species will disappear. So I predict that the RHS plantfinder is likely to get smaller.
- Less choice** We are all so aware of the controlling nature of not just our own government, but also of the EU. Our choice of vegetable seeds has been dramatically cut over the last few

years because of EU regulations. There is now a move by the EU to do the same thing in the flower garden. If this happens, it won't be a case of us not growing particular flowers, it's more a case that they will be impossible to obtain, and we will lose them forever. Once again a new breed of plant hunters may well be hunting for varieties in the cottage gardens of our countryside.

More control

Driven by commercial factors, there will be an ever increasing list of F1 hybrid annual flowers. Because the seed is infertile, we will have to turn to the seed retailers or the plug-plant sellers for our bedding plants. And again, our traditional plant list will be reduced even further.

Seed Library

Perhaps the only hope is the Heritage Seed Library. An organisation set up to save our traditional plants for the future. When it becomes impossible to purchase our traditional plants, provided it is given enough private support, members will be able to 'borrow' seeds from the library, returning seed at the end of the year. The Hardy Plant Society and National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens will both attempt to save our traditional plants for the future, so every new member to either of these charities can only help the situation.

Gardeners Herbs

All of us here are gardeners, we all grow plants be they vegetables, fruit or flowers, but we all grow plants. Why? To eat? To look at? To enjoy?

Here are a few tips used by our grandparents which I am investigating for my own use. Do try them out then get back to me and let me know how successful they have been.

Milk. The fatty acids in full cream milk have an amazing property. Take ½ cup milk, (not semi or skimmed, but real milk), add to 1 pint of water. Spray on to any of the plants susceptible to autumn mould fortnightly from mid spring to mid summer. Your Asters, Solidago etc, will be mould-free throughout autumn.

Garlic We've been trying this one for a while and had some good success? Slug repellent! At the nursery, we rarely ever get slug damage on the stronger Alliums, slugs just do not like them.

We have found that boiling a few cloves of garlic, gives us the basis of a good slug repellent. But there's the problem. Spray onto hostas and the liquid simply runs off the foliage, so we add a few drops of washing-up liquid. So here's the recipe. Soak four crushed cloves of garlic in a pint of water. Filter and bottle making back up to one pint. Add 5 drops of washing up liquid. Use 2 tablespoons of prepared liquid in a pint of water and spray foliage on a warm dry day so the liquid has a chance to dry on the foliage. Repeat once a week.

Marestail Many fungal disorders of plants including blackspot on roses can be dealt with using a concoction made from the liquid left after boiling a good handful of marestail in a pint of water. Marestail contains a few weird chemicals including cobalt. Use the liquid, diluted at the rate of two tables spoons per pint of water, as a spray once a week during late spring and into early summer.

Comfrey

Fertilizer has become fantastically expensive. A bag that cost us £40.00 in 2005 now costs £240.00, so anything we can do to reduce the cost help us. Comfrey contains very high levels of Potassium, the main mineral that plants use to create flowers and fruit. Collect large quantities of comfrey foliage and submerge it in water for a week. Use the resultant liquid as a foliar feed.

Nettles

As with comfrey, nettles are high in iron, Phosphorus and many other minerals. Prepare a feed in the same way.

Companion planting Marigolds, chives, shallots and nasturtiums –. Will either repel unwanted bugs, or act as sacrificial food leaving your food crop untouched.

Origanum, Thyme – mould prevention. We all know about the anti-bacterial effect of some of our culinary herbs. This is an exciting trial we're conducting now. The disinfecting qualities of thyme, garlic etc, seems to work in preventing mildew on late-flowering perennials like asters and solidago. I'll keep you informed.

Vine Weevils have extended their range from potentillas and a few pot plants 30 years ago to a point today where nearly every plant group is at risk – except members of the allium family. We are running trials at the moment to see how effective our garlic repellent is in deterring vine weavils. The adult females will not lay their eggs in soil contaminated with garlic. Our task is to identify the months when the plants are at greatest risk. But certainly, garlic works well in repelling aphids.

Caffeine. Is very toxic to slugs and snails. Make up a black coffee using real coffee, not instant. Does not need to be very strong, in fact, you can use the coffee ground after you've made your own coffee to make a weaker solution. This should be watered into the soil around your vulnerable plants. Problem is, it's illegal to use it because no one has paid the £200,000 to prove it's value and safety as a pest control. So I'm not saying use it, I'm just saying it works.