

# The edible, fruitful and beautiful garden in summer

Bruce Nixon



A garden provides healing and joy. Blessed with trees round our garden, we enjoy the song of birds as we wake and at dusk. We hear the laughter of neighbours playing with

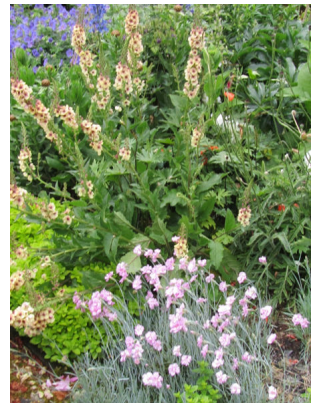
their children. Gardening is an expression of creativity. It can also be a meditation, working with rather than against nature, close to nature of which we forget we are a part. Mindfulness comes with being and doing, not getting things done. Wellbeing comes from using our bodies, our legs, arms, getting our hands dirty and sweating, like our ancestors, instead of using noisy, polluting machines that hasten climate change and use up the ancient, precious oil laid down millions of years ago. In 50 years I have had only two lawn mowers: both human powered Husqvarna mowers with sixteen inch blades. Mowing this way helps keep me fit and sane.

I love early summer. Spring is a time of the re-awakening of life. Summer is a time of profusion when all the previous work of envisioning, re-arranging, pruning, splitting up, planting, sowing seeds and caring for the soil bears fruit. I grow old shrub and climbing roses with clematis twining through them, tree and herbaceous peonies and bearded irises. An old rose climbs into a fruit tree, another into a yew. In my view the best roses are the very old varieties like 13<sup>th</sup> century *Ispahan*, also

known as *Pompon des Princes*, 18<sup>th</sup> century *Charles de Mills*, and Victorian Moss and Bourbon roses including bi-colours. Fragrance, especially in the evening, is provided by *Nicotiana Affinis*, *Philadelphus Belle Etoile*, False Solomon's Seal and Jasmine. Fragrant old pinks such as Victorian *Mrs Sinkins* grow beside the front path.

I have a passion for growing Garden Organic Heritage squash and climbing French beans with their extraordinary names like *Inca*, *Blue Coco* and *Cherokee Trail of Tears*. My indulgent wife allows me to start these seeds on the sitting room floor in front of the French windows. The art is to provide interest and beauty for the eye throughout the year. Hot midsummer is a challenge in this respect. It means providing a succession of flowers that will keep flowering if dead headed, many of which will be shades of yellow and orange. It also means having foliage of striking and contrasting colours, heights and shapes – a sculptural and architectural garden. The first garden I made was in tropical Jamaica. That influences me to create a dramatic garden with tall plants like giant inulas, cardoons, angelica and wild grey leaved verbascum, loved by bees. It helps to divide a garden into rooms and hot and shady parts.

At weekends I hover round our Country





Market and plant stalls at farmers' markets looking for something new. My sources of plants are Philip Smith's Sunnyside Nursery near Northchurch,

Little Heath Farm Nursery and Chessmount Nursery in Chesham. In my previous article, I mentioned ecological or Permaculture principles. I follow the cycle of nature. However, I am not an eco-angel especially where slugs are concerned. I plant close. So weeds don't have a chance. In my vegetable patch, I practice companion planting to discourage disease and hostile insects. I use no herbicides, moss killer or chemical fertilisers. Leaving the mowings on the lawn, it fertilises itself. Not cutting it close, especially in hot dry weather, keeps it healthy. Then moss and most weeds have less scope. In any case weeds so-called are really the wild flowers on which we depend. We hardly ever use our green wheelie bin. Instead, vegetable waste, cardboard and tissue go onto the compost heap. The drought has transformed my attitude to water. We now have buckets outside our front and back doors into which we throw the washing up water for thirsty plants. I have yet to devise a water harvesting system.

I make my garden friendly to bees, other pollinating insects, and I provide untidy places for the likes of helpful frogs who like slugs. I grow bee friendly flowers

like wild cornflowers and single flowered, not double, hollyhocks which bees can easily get into. Bees adore Pulmonaria which flowers early and keeps flowering if dead-headed. Bees are a threatened species. The reasons are complex, but our use of pesticides containing Neonicotinoids is probably a major cause: [www.soilassociation.org/wildlife/bees/householdpesticides](http://www.soilassociation.org/wildlife/bees/householdpesticides). Without pollinating insects we'll starve, so supporting them is vital.

Humans commit ecocide and collective suicide as we carelessly destroy nature and the resources of our finite planet. There is an alternative: the pursuit of wellbeing for all instead of greed and growth.

Bruce Nixon is a writer, speaker, a member of Transition Town Berkhamsted and author of *A Better World is Possible* <http://www.bruce-nixon.com/betterworld.html>. **yB**

