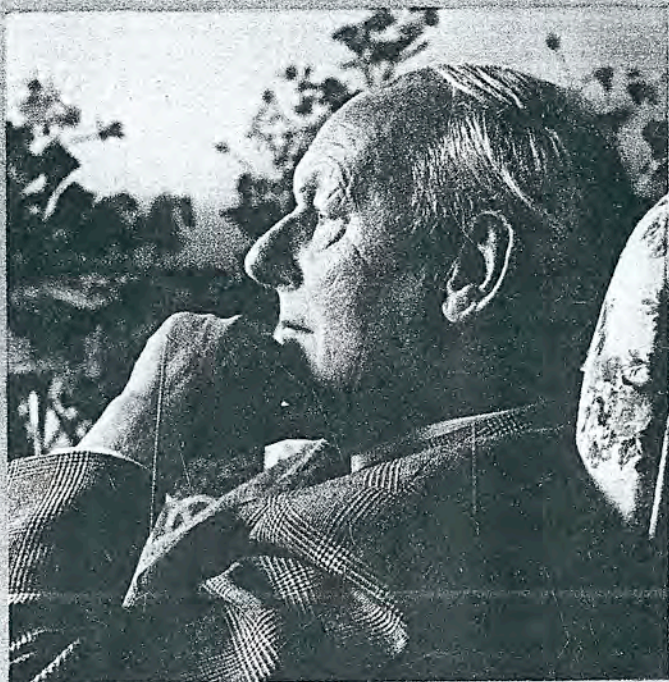


Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1968.

From my Garden
by H. E. Bates

IN PRAISE OF LATER LADIES

The well-known novelist writes
about how his garden grows



Whenever and if ever I come to write a book called 'The Pious and Painful Lamentations of a Private Gardener', one of the foremost subjects with which I shall deal, after burning at the stake such mouldy old myths as fog in March, frost in May, always soon when the moon is waxing, and parsley goes to the devil seven times before it comes up, and so on, will be a common lamentation to which I have to listen painfully several times a year.

This was well expressed some time ago by that well-known and excellent columnist Anne Scott-James, whose new-found interest and delight in gardening knows no bounds. 'Why,' she pleaded, 'should my border look so full of colour and joy in spring and early summer, only to be tawdry, if not actually completely wrecked and finished, by the time August arrives? What am I to do with all those ghastly gaps and the funereal effect of the border being inhabited by a colony of wizened and decaying gnomes?'

It is 35 years since the same problem confronted and vexed me and about 30 years since I considered I had at least practically begun to conquer it. In those days, in spring, my borders were gay with lupins, irises, paeonies, pyrethrums, anchusa, poppies, tulips, pansies and a host of other gay ladies of April and May. Alas, for them all, including a great many spring shrubs such as lilacs, flowering cherries, laburnums, flowering currants and so

Living' Dec 1968

on, their flowering life is all too, too brief. Beloved by the gods though they may be, they die young. A single hot week in May will leave your lupins looking like a crop of rather badly grown peas. You will find that the same spasm of heat will blow your paeony petals to the wind as easily as it does the downy clock-face of a seeding dandelion.

Thinking hard on all this, I became ruthless; out went my lupins, poppies, irises, pyrethrums, geums and all their short-lived brethren. I also read voraciously. I came to a decision that my borders, instead of fainting away in the third week of June, should only then be beginning a performance which, if things went well, would continue through July, August, September, October and even November. In this I was staunchly supported and inspired by that supreme gardener, Gertrude Jekyll, some of the pictures of whose October borders are a Whistler-like dream.

Here I should make it clear that I am no purist in the matter of herbaceous borders; a garden is a place to grow flowers in, not principles. I therefore permit myself the heresy of allowing dahlias in. Nor do I despise all spring flowering plants because their flowers fade away so soon. That grand architectural beauty *Helleborus corsicus*, is just as handsome when flowerless in late summer and autumn, as it is in flower in winter and spring. The same is true of the euphorbias, particularly *E. griffithii*, and the various epimediums, all too rarely grown, and the hosts of ericas.

But what I looked for most were plants that flower on and on. It took me some years to discover *Catananche caerulea*, a kind of mauve everlasting daisy I have already mentioned in this column; it took even longer to find the prize of asters, *A. frikartii*, which last year obliged with a display of great elegance from July to October; *Sedum Autumn Joy* had not then been introduced, but no garden should ever be without its fascinating six-month display of bud and blossom.

Of grey-leaved plants, about which so much has been written lately, I hesitate to go on still further, but the silver touches of *Cineraria maritima*, *Stachys lanata*, *Anaphalis triplinervis*, the various *Artemisia*, especially Lamhook silver, are all indispensable for lighting up the Michaelmas daisies and cooling down the more fiery look of the dahlias. Then there are the eryngiums and echinops with their bluish steely thistle heads; *Verbena bonariensis* with its 5ft architecture of purple heads; the many new Golden Rods, from positive mimosa-like babies to 7ft giants; the perennial best of Michaelmas daisies—all ancient varieties should be as ruthlessly discarded as if they were ground-elder—and a 5ft *Polygonum* which I name, perhaps mistakenly as Donald Lowndes, which begins to show its red spikes in July and carries them nobly on until November.

Add to all these the many rudbeckias (the mixed chocolate and yellow annual varieties often oblige by being perennial for at least a year or two), Hypericums (the possible best is *Hidcote Beauty*) and the late blue Monks'-Hoods and you will find that there will be little room in your four-month pageant of blossom for scruffy little gnomes. Even by October you will find plants that haven't even begun their seasonal display: *Zauschneria Californica Mexicana*, brilliant scarlet, is one that revels in heat; two blue beauties, *Plumbago larpentae* and *Ceratostigma willmottiae* are so like sisters that they are often mistaken for each other.

And lastly three great endearing favourites of mine: the border phloxes, which with careful selection of varieties, will carry through from July to October (spring cuttings make excellent dwarf plants to flower the same summer and are as easily grown as mustard and cress); the joyful race of herbaceous penstemons, flowering for the same period—I cannot understand for the life of me why they are not more grown—and the great new generation of hemerocallis or Day Lilies, about which I hope to write a later article.