



THE GARDEN GIRL

CAROLINE BROOME

Now here's the thing; I decided on the topic of Shrubs for this column way back in January. Little did I know how relevant that would be. Let me ask, how many of you have lost your hebes this winter? Pretty much all of you, I'm guessing. After years of sailing through our winters without a scratch, this evergreen stalwart turned up its toes in spectacular fashion. Large gaps appeared in borders where not much else would thrive, alternatives not forthcoming. Which got me thinking, if this reliable shrub could die, then we really need to rethink our ideas of what's suitable for these increasingly extreme weather conditions.

Whilst colourful perennials shape my garden from April to November, come the winter months and the garden can look bare and soulless. By February I'm gazing out at the garden wishing I had something to look at! It's time to invest in some fool proof evergreens to redress the seasonal balance. But choose wisely! remember: adapt or die!

In my garden pittosporums win first prize for adaptability. They are evergreen, totally hardy and drought resistant. Admittedly, their flowers may look insignificant, but they provide vital pollen and nectar for bees and many are highly scented. They tolerate most soils, are low maintenance and easy to prune. Have I

convinced you yet? Take a look if you don't believe me: tinyurl.com/mrxvdwyf. My favourite is Tom Thumb, small to medium round habit, spring green foliage gradually turning to deep burgundy.

Evergreen euonymus is another favourite. Now don't turn your nose up at this staple of the municipal border! If planted against a wall or fence in a dark corner they will happily sprawl up and out, providing year-round interest and vibrance to an otherwise dead space. There are pillar varieties, adding formality and symmetry to an herbaceous border. Bone hardy and easy to prune at any time of year, you can even topiarise them.

And here's another shrub bound to get you sneering; mahonia! I'm with you on this one, with one exception: Mahonia Soft Caress. With none of the stiff stems and spiny leaves of traditional mahonias such as Charity, Soft Caress has fern like foliage upon arching stems. Whichever your favour, they will provide year-round interest in dry shade or semi-shade and will fill the air with lily-of-the-valley like fragrance from their characteristic yellow flowering sprays in November and December.

Nandina or Heavenly Bamboo is another winner: Nandina Domestica is a slow growing evergreen to about 6ft tall with coppery foliage in spring, small white flowers turning to red berries in autumn. There are several dwarf varieties such as Gulf Stream, Lemon and Lime and variegated Twilight, ideal for the front of the border or containers, no pruning required.

For those of you with acid to neutral soils, rhododendrons and camelias will continue to fare well in contrasting conditions, provided you are prepared to water your specimens copiously in August. Failure to keep them moist at this time will result in no flowers the following summer. With hose pipe bans and low reservoirs becoming increasingly common, they may not be the most suitable choices if your garden is sitting on heavy clay, which dries and cracks in summer.

As climate change continues to make its presence felt, it's no surprise that conifers are making a comeback. Amongst the anarchy of my overstuffed perennial border, I have found room for a pair of columnar Cypressus Pyramidalis. Slow growing and low maintenance, they have provided a touch of sophistication to the displays.

I think evergreen shrubs have somehow gained the reputation for being clumsy, overbearing members of the mixed border, perhaps because we don't allow them enough room to reach their full potential. A few carefully selected specimens can transform your plot into a year round garden as well as providing pollen and nectar for insects during the bleak winter months. Still worried your garden is too small for some evergreens? There's a neat trick that I use which allows both shrub

and herbaceous plants to flourish: skirt pruning. This involves cutting away the lower branches of your shrub in order to raise the canopy

enough to allow light into the ground cover underneath. Plant now to allow new shrubs to establish before their first winter.



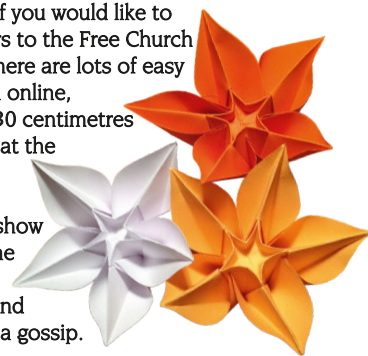
The joy of colourful shrubs (Photo: Caroline Broome)

Prizes at Hort. Society June Flower Show

MARJORIE HARRIS

This being Coronation year, the Horticultural Society's June Flower Show has a right royal theme for the Photography and Junior classes, which could also be reflected in a brand new paper flower competition open to everyone. On 10 June, 3-5pm, visitors to the flower show at the Free Church Hall in Northway will find 'A Right Royal Celebration' in one of the photography classes open to all ages, and 'A Vase of Red, White and Blue Flowers' to be displayed by under-16s. Did you take lots of photographs on Coronation Day? Perhaps the prize-winning entry is among them. The Horticultural Society is hoping that lots of people will enter their pictures, and that Juniors will find lots of red, white and blue flowers to show to help make a spectacular impression in this Coronation year. There are prizes! For details, join the Society if you haven't already (HGSHS.membership@virginmedia.com), and you will receive the 2023 Handbook with all the information you need. There is no charge for under-18s.

In another first, a Paper Flower Competition open to all ages will be held in the hall during the show. If you would like to enter, please bring your paper flowers to the Free Church Hall by 11am on Saturday 10 June. There are lots of easy instructions as to how to make them online, but your flowers should not exceed 30 centimetres in any dimension. As well as looking at the competitive displays of flowers, vegetables, cookery, preserving and photography, regular visitors to the show know that, on this day in Summer, the small hall at the Free Church Hall is the very best place to meet friends and family for tea, home-made cake and a gossip.



Above: Nandina Domestica
Below: Mahonia Soft Caress
(Photos: Caroline Broome)



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