



JUNE IN THE GARDEN

By **Russell Jordan**



It would be amiss of me not to start by mentioning the passing of Nigel Dunnett at the end of April. His planting philosophy is behind a lot of the way our garden planting has changed, in very recent years, as the garden designers he educated and inspired have gone on to careers where his principles are actualised in the real world. His planting schemes prioritise plants that thrive in local conditions, tolerate drought, and support pollinators; plants chosen to be “sensible citizens rather than needy aristocrats.” Most famous for his seed mixes, seen to great effect, admired by millions in the ‘Olympic Park’ in 2012 and also in the moat at the ‘Tower of London’. The easiest way to get a bit of Dunnett magic in your own garden is to sow one of his seed mixes sold as ‘Pictorial Meadows’.

I must admit that my own gardening style is still rooted in the more Christopher Lloyd, mixed borders and higher maintenance, style of garden planting. I think I’d find it hard to jettison all the plants, collected over a gardening lifetime, which populate my garden and to replace them with a truly self-sustaining, ecologically balanced, species mix. It would require a huge amount of preparation to make the sort of beds needed to encourage growing, evolving, self-seeding and dynamic plant populations, that mimic natural ecosystems. I fear the whole scheme being overrun by all the native weed species, which are present in any already established garden, and which you can only really eradicate if you are starting with a totally sterile, ‘clean slate’ soil. If you are making a garden from scratch, then his philosophy is certainly the way to go.

If there is one plant which definitely fits the ‘needy aristocrat’ title then it would be the herbaceous delphinium, once a staple part of the classic herbaceous border, which peaks around this time of year. It requires a lot of feeding, watering, staking and protecting from slugs, their mortal enemy, which I think explains why they are much less often seen in

gardens nowadays. I think anything which is very prone to slug damage, hostas being another plant used much less than it was in my horticultural student days, as copious applications of metaldehyde slug pellets are no longer possible. At least with delphiniums there are species which you can grow from seed and are possible to be used in ‘flowering meadow’ schemes; *Delphinium consolida* and *D. requienii* are two that spring to mind.

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Much of the maintenance needed in June is a continuation of what you’ve already been doing for the past month or so. Continue dead-heading flowers as they go over, except where you might want to leave them to mature into attractive seed heads or, in the case of some roses, ‘hips’. Although it really should have been done before now, if you want the supports to become invisible, it may be necessary to step in with emergency pea-sticks, or bamboo canes and string, if one of those summer, squally, downpours threatens to collapse sections of a herbaceous border. Way back when I did student placements in ‘National Trust’ gardens, there was a particular constituent of the herbaceous border which I don’t think I’ve seen for years; *Galega officinalis* (Goat’s Rue). It came to mind just now as, along with 6-8ft tall *Delphinium*, it was a tall herbaceous perennial which was really prone to collapse—even when you thought you’d trussed it up, good and proper, well before it started to flower. I can see why a ‘self supporting’ and ‘self sustaining’ planting scheme might be a worthwhile consideration!

Lawns will be growing rapidly at this time of year,

assuming we're not experiencing a drought, so keeping on top of the mowing is essential. Of course, replacing a large lawn with a Nigel Dunnet inspired scheme, if you have the sort of garden where it can be a suitably generous area, would be an excellent idea and certainly a more useful concept than 'no mow May'. I've often written about creating a wildflower meadow, in place of a lawn, but this only really works in gardens above a certain size where the meadow can be at least the size of a small field. Small areas of grass, left uncut, tend to just look untidy and won't be large enough to add anything meaningful to the biodiversity of your garden.

Ponds, on the other hand, can add a useful extra dimension to the habitats available for wildlife in your garden. It's amazing how even a relatively small pond can sustain frogs, dragonfly larvae, newts, pond snails etc. etc. and allow you to grow aquatic and marginal plants which you wouldn't otherwise have in your planting palette. June is a good month to give them a bit of a clean up, thinning out of pond weed especially, as the water should be warm enough that the task isn't too unpleasant and any disturbance will soon be 'healed' by the actively growing plants. If you remove excess pond weed, you want there to be at least two thirds of open water, remember to leave it at the side of the pond so that any creepy-crawlies, caught up in it, can wriggle free and make their way back into the water.

On the subject of 'creepy crawlies'; pest species can get out of hand this month because they have plenty to sink their voracious teeth into (not that most of them actually have teeth!) and warm temperatures maximise breeding. Aphids and caterpillars are most prevalent so regular checking and removal, by whatever method you favour, is the order of the day. Before using chemicals remember that these can upset

the delicate balance between the plant pests and their natural predators so using them may actually result in worse infestations a few weeks down the line. If you can bear to remove the pest by hand, usually the case for the oft-mentioned, bright red, lily beetle, it may prove enough to keep their numbers down so that they don't completely defoliate their host plant. Lilies are another plant species which I fear will become less common in gardens due to lily beetles becoming so prevalent that lilies can no longer be relied on as a 'perennial'. Sadly, no more evocations of 'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose' (John Singer Sargent, 1885).



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