



## JULY IN THE GARDEN

By **Russell Jordan**

At the time of writing, we've had a decent amount of rain, so far, this summer to allow garden plants to grow and flourish pretty 'normally'. As mentioned last month, traditional planting schemes, based largely on the concept of the 'herbaceous border', relied on plants, such as stately delphiniums, which peaked in June and there could be something of a 'flowering gap' in July. A lot of the early summer herbaceous material can be cut back after the initial flowering, herbaceous geraniums particularly benefit from this to control their sprawling nature, so that's something to be done as a timely task. With the planting palette in modern gardens leaning more towards, 'Oudolf style', new perennial plants, many borders now peak later and keep flowering for longer using genera such as *Helenium*, *Rudbeckia*, *Sanguisorba*, *Thalictrum*, *Veronicastrum*, *Agastache*, *Echinacea* and numerous ornamental grasses.

Ornamental grasses are really only just getting into their stride, this month, and, certainly the indestructible *Miscanthus*, can provide a real 'backbone' to the mixed border as their foliage adds the kind of 'weight' and contrast, to flowering plants, that shrubs might perform in a more traditional scheme. Smaller, more ephemeral, grass specimens, such as *Stipa tenuissima* or *Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra', can be woven through the front of borders, acting as a foil to the flowering plants and tying the scheme together.

On the subject of 'foils'; the lawn is traditionally the foil to the planted areas of a garden as it provides a stable, uniform, shape and colour compared to the dynamic, constantly changing and evolving, ornamental plants in beds and borders. I'm sure I write this every year but it's always worth reiterating; if we have a drought period, and the grass threatens to turn brown, you should resist the urge to waste loads of water, using lawn sprinklers to keep it wet, because water is a precious resource and lawns will always green up again once it rains. Raising the cutting height of the mower blades, allowing the lawn to grow a little longer, is one way to reduce stress when water is scarce. If we are having a decent amount of rain, now is probably the last chance to do major lawn improvements, such as moss removal, weeding and feeding, while there's still enough growing time for the lawn to recover before the autumn.

A timely task, which tends to pop up as needing to be done in July, is the summer pruning of wisteria. After flowering wisteria tends to put on a lot of 'whippy' growth. This can get really out of control if not removed before it entwines everything within several metres of the offending plant! On young specimens, which have yet to fill their allotted space,

generally a wiring system attached to a wall or pergola, some of the new growth can be tied onto the supporting wires to fill any gaps that remain. Established plants tend to more than fill whatever area they are meant to cover, growing up under the eaves of a house and under slates or into the roof void, so keeping control of the excess extension growth is essential. The aim, of this summer prune, is to shorten all the extension growth to just a few leaf nodes, the portion of stem where the leaves attach to the stem, so that these can be shortened further, traditionally in February, when the stems are leafless and you can see what you're doing. With a really rampant specimen I'd probably not bother with leaving any leaf nodes, on completely out of control stems, and I'd remove them in their entirety. Too much whippy growth just puts a huge amount of strain on the wired support system and the weight can, literally, peel the whole plant off its supports and damage anything underneath. Stems twining around, behind, even into, downpipes are particularly troublesome as they get fatter and fatter every year until they force the pipework off the wall; prompt intervention is paramount.

Elsewhere in the garden the continuous cycle of deadheading will help to keep floral displays performing well into the autumn. Plants in pots and containers will require watering and feeding, even if we do get some rain, as they rely on you to provide for their every need and any feed that was in the original potting compost will have been exhausted by now. I generally use a 'slow release', granular, fertiliser whenever I plant up containers. In older ones a liquid feed when watering (follow the dilution and timing advice on your chosen brand) is necessary to keep annuals and tender perennials flowering reliably for the whole season. Watering is a good time to look out for any pests or diseases that might be getting going and doing whatever you need to do to nip these problems in the bud (as it were).

With high light levels and enough time passed to have 'ripened' the plant material, July is a good time to experiment with taking cuttings of all sorts of garden plants. Search the internet, or seek out a good handbook, for any specifics of taking cuttings but the general method I've always used is;

Take non-flowering shoots where possible, thick enough to withstand pushing into loose compost, and to trim them up so that they are at least finger length, with a couple of leaves at the shoot tip, and denuded from the tip down. Always trim below the lowest leaf joint with a sharp knife, preferably a craft blade, and additionally reduce the tip leaves too if they are over large.

I get the best results from using a multipurpose compost ameliorated by the addition of at least 50% grit / perlite to

keep the mixture 'open' (full of air and free draining). Your compost should only be lightly firmed into the pot, not rammed hard, to ensure that there is still plenty of air left in it. I think it's trickier these days, with peat-free formulations, as composts now tend to dry out too quickly so you may have to experiment – maybe use vermiculite instead (although I now note that some people frown on using additives like perlite / vermiculite – it's almost as if they want you to fail!).

Insert the cuttings around the outside of the pot, rooting tends to be quicker in cuttings at the edge of the pot rather than in the middle. Water well with a fine rose watering can. Finally, to maintain a humid atmosphere around the cuttings,


place a polythene bag over the whole ensemble and tie at the top. A length of cane pushed into the centre of the pot keeps the bag off the cuttings and gives you something to tie against. Tender perennials propagated at this time of year should root readily, under their own steam, but hormone rooting powder may help in slower rooting specimens and can guard against rotting as it also contains fungicide. Place somewhere inside, such as a light windowsill, but not somewhere where they will roast in the noonday sun.

I think that should give you enough to be getting on with and, hopefully, at some point you'll remember to actually sit down and just enjoy being in your garden!

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