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On the making of a garden



H E Bates, who has just published the second volume of his autobiography, *The Blossoming World*, and two years ago, *The Vanished World* (both from Michael Joseph), here gives an account of his own garden in the Kentish Weald

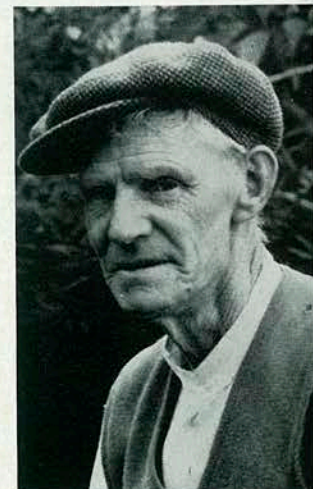
THE MAN is the book; the book is the man. This incontestable truth, which I often repeat to myself, I claim to be as true of gardens as it is of authors and their books. As a man is, so is his garden. He is a reflection of it, and it of him.

For this reason, whenever I am asked how I planned my garden, I always reply 'I didn't. It evolved; moreover, it evolved from a very unpromising piece of a farmyard full of docks, nettles, thistles and just about any other noxious weed common to farmyards. Moreover—and this is a point of much importance—it is still evolving. A garden, I contend, should never stand still. It should never be a monument to complacency. However beautiful it may be, there is surely, always, something that isn't quite right—a path needs widening here, a border there needs to be narrowed, a bed elsewhere needs a deeper, more flowing curve, a section of the rock garden has become so overgrown that it looks like a man with too long a beard, the bones of it, or the rocks, invisible under forests of plant whiskers.

Whenever these things occur, or others of the same kind, I bring out a ruthless hand. Change, I tell myself, is not decay; change is resuscitation, a new view, excitement. So, every year, some part of the garden, however small, is torn apart and remoulded nearer to the heart's desire. Those silly flag irises that flower for a bare fortnight in midsummer—what *are* they doing there? taking up precious space that could be filled with something that would flower for three or four months, such as that glorious purple beauty, *Aster*

Frikartii, which will give you joy from July to November. And why persist with that indifferent clump of lupins that flake away in a week of hot sun, when they could be replaced by something such as *Artemisia Lambrook Silver*, a flowerless joy of pure loveliness that will light up the border with incomparable incandescence and at the same time cool down the autumn fires of dahlias, or that other incomparable delight *Sedum Autumn Joy*, so exquisite in green bud, still more exquisite is its green-and-claret half-open flower,

Opposite page Neatly-paved paths, brimming flowerbeds and an urn full of flowers make a pleasing picture of H E Bates' garden in Kent



Gardener Aubrey





1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8
9	10
11	12

- 1 *Artemisia*, dahlias and variegated grass
- 2 *Salvia Patens*
- 3 *Phlox norah leigh*
- 4 *Sedum spectabile*, *Artemisia Lambrook Silver*
- 5 *Oenothera odorata*
- 6 *Convolvulus tricolor*
- 7 *Geraniums with variegated leaves*
- 8 *Fuchsia Thalia*
- 9 *Blue-flowered Clematis*
- 10 *Geraniums*
- 11 striped leaved grass with

12 *Green flowered nicotiana 'Limelight' and Salvia patens*
Opposite page In the foreground *Fuchsia Thalia* Beyond is a mound of *Vitis coignetiae*

and most exquisite of all is its full rich red wine vintage, a dancing stage for butterflies for weeks on end.

All this pre-supposes a considerable knowledge of plants, often very uncommon ones, that can only come of long and wide experience. But are knowledge and experience enough? Are they everything? I contend not. Something of infinitely greater importance is needed before one can achieve the ultimate state where it can be said 'the man is the garden, the garden the man.' And this something, I maintain, is affection.

Last summer a well-known horticulturalist and writer on gardening matters, who himself owns a garden of classical grace conforming to the highest possible standards, asked if he could come to see my garden. I said yes and trembled. What on earth could an old bungling amateur like me have to offer that could possibly interest the trained and knowledgeable professional? I feared a keen and critical eye.

I needn't have worried. It happened that he arrived on an evening of delicious autumn light falling at a low angle on the garden in its full late glory. Great purple stretches of *Verbena Venosa*, another treasure that will flower for six months; an aristocrat among fuchsias, the red-leaved, orange-flowered *Thalia*; the silky mauve carpet of *Convolvulus mauritanicus*; the pink and scarlet glory of two salvias, *S Invulcrata* and *S Fulgens*—all this, together with an array of many green-and-gold variegations of foliage, seemed to set the evening in tune, so that if the flowers didn't actually sing they appeared to be in a symphonic harmony.

Next day the bungling old amateur received a gracious letter from the experienced professional: *I loved your garden*, he wrote, *because it gave the feeling of being loved.*

My garden, in fact, was I; it wasn't professionally designed by one of those firms of landscape gardeners whose work you see every year at Chelsea. It was conceived in love, was loved and gave the feeling of being loved.

That, in fact, is what true gardens are made of ●

