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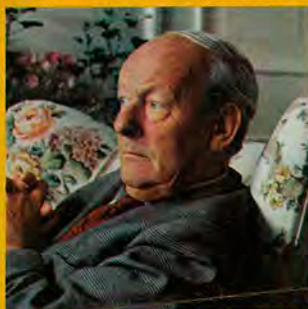
FROM MY GARDEN

# later & later joys

by

H. E. Bates

the well-known novelist writes  
about how his garden grows



won't bloom at all because it isn't grown to bloom but is there for the enduring pleasures of foliage alone.

Among these are many plants of grey or silver leaf. So much has been written these last few years about the virtues and joys of grey-leaved things that I hesitate to add to it further. But of one thing I am absolutely sure: no garden can or should be without them. Their capacity to give contrast and illumination is infinite. That they require a little more trouble and care than most other things I don't deny. Few are reliably hardy but all will winter well, from late summer cuttings, in cold greenhouse and frame.

Space won't allow me to list here all the silvers that will reward you. But for myself I especially love the better variants of *cineraria maritima* (you can raise the type from seed, but the brighter, more silvery variants are infinitely better); *pyrethrum pinnatifidum*, like a silver fern and also easily raised from seed and treated as an annual; *stachys lanata*, of which there are now improved types; *centaurea gymnocarpa*, also like a fern and in its best form (though it too can be raised easily from seed) quite the most aristocratic of all silvers; the many *artemisias*, both short and tall, the old *santolina* or southernwood, *salvia*

*argentea* and the many new silver-leaved *gazanias*, so easily struck and wintered from cuttings, and all having the virtue of looking attractive even in summers when lack of sun condemns them to be almost flowerless.

You can play infinite themes with these silvers, gaining effects either cooling or dramatic according to what marriages you care to arrange. The strong dark coppery foliage and crimson-scarlet of *fuchsia Thalia* against the low brilliance of the *cineraria* or *centaurea gymnocarpa*; the gentian blue of *salvia patens* behind the silken silver of *convolvulus cneorum*, another tender beauty; the strong reds of dahlias and even the magentas and purples of certain phloxes against the taller grace of *artemisias*. There is no end to the elegance, contrast and light all these will provide.

Another of my reasons for planning that my garden shall come to its zenith in late summer and autumn is because, in fact, the sun is then past its zenith. The angle of light gets lower every day. 'Never look at your garden at mid-day,' a painter once said to me and I have never forgotten his words. In straight, strong, perpendicular light, flowers rarely look their best. As the angle of light changes and lowers in August so shadows lengthen and all colour and contrast is lovelier; so that eventually, when the michaelmas daisies are in full glory, heavy with butterflies, there are effects as of light seen through lace, of shadow heightening light, and light deepening shadow.

This indeed is the year's fruition: ripeness is all. Therefore don't be mingly. Be bold; plant in massive, generous groups; and above all avoid lines. Gardens indeed should be like lovely, well-shaped girls: all curves, secret corners, unexpected deviations, seductive surprises and then still more curves; and at last, of course, satisfaction of senses, heart and eye.

*In Praise of Older Women* was the title of a recent book that had a much-deserved success. This article is similarly in praise of later and later joys. Therefore plan now, as you read, in February, and reap your rewards richer and later. Search for plants that bloom from July to October, for others which, though blooming for not so long a period, look as attractive in leaf as in flower; and above all plant abundantly. Or, in other words, as the late Alexander Korda once said to a young film director about to make a film of Venice—'Give them an eyeful'.

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When the perennial question, 'How is your garden?' comes up in August I am invariably able to reply with something like 'It's just coming up to its best' or 'It's just beginning to do what I told it'. Either or both of these answers never fail to provoke in the questioners a look of disbelief, scepticism or just plain old-fashioned distrust, as if to say 'Here he goes again', seemingly to indicate that I am either pulling people's legs or casually boasting or simply trying the reverse of that other old horticultural perennial, 'Oh! you should have been here last week!'

Nevertheless it is perfectly true that my garden doesn't begin to come up to its best until early August and furthermore that it will go on being at its best throughout the rest of the month, on into September and even long into October. The August heart-cry from friends and visitors who declare, 'But mine is absolutely finished. You must have awfully good soil' or something of that sort always fails to impress me. The reason for my garden looking at its best in the eighth, ninth and tenth months of the year has nothing to do with soil, latitude, weather or chance. It is doing and looking its best at that time because I told it to. And I told it to, or started to tell it, back in February, a month in which you will be reading these words.

It is a good many years now since, by devoting much study to that great gardener Gertrude Jekyll, I became aware of the pleasures of later and later joys. This is not to say that I don't love the early joys of gardens or the briefer pleasures of the darling buds of May. I merely became aware that as the year progresses it grows horticulturally richer, that flowers tend on the whole to last much longer and that as days shorten they, together with every bud, flower and scrap of colour, grow more and more precious.

So, in the second week of August, after a summer of great brilliance and heat, I can look out of my window and enjoy the ever richer and richer dividends of the thoughts and plans I began to invest in during February. Half at least of what I see will go on flowering for another six weeks, much of it for two months, some until nearly November. Some things, among them penstemons, fuchsias, perennial asters, *Sedum Autumn Joy*, certain hostas, heleniums, and rudbeckias, a good number of dahlias, several species of *salvia* and even some phloxes, will have just begun to bloom. A good deal