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A few months ago, as I walked round my garden early one warm brilliant morning, the distant hills were touched with the softest opalescent light, the sun was pure liquid gold, clear as wine, and it was hard to believe that it was the first day of October. So beautiful was the garden then that I felt like giving it an overture with full orchestra and toasting it in the best champagne.

Some weeks before that memorable morning, possibly the most beautiful of the entire year, I had been extolling the virtues of a very well-known garden to two gardening friends. This garden they had never seen before and I gave it, if not quite a full orchestra of praise, at least several resounding trumpet calls. Particularly I praised its long shrub-herbaceous border, beautifully planned and kept, rich with all sorts of desirable flowers. This, I assured them, was the *pièce de résistance*, on no account to be missed by gardening enthusiasts.

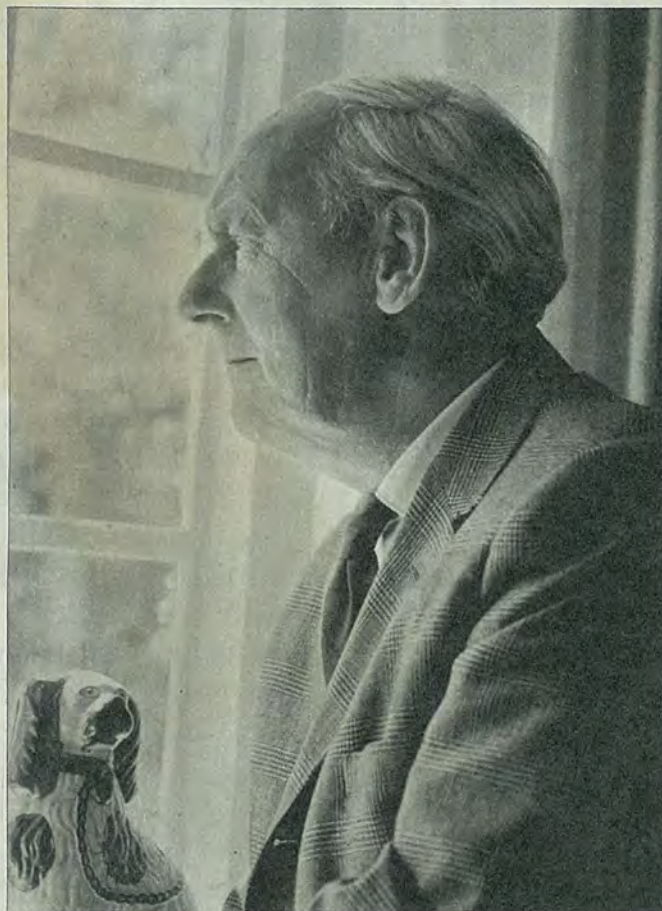
All this was in mid-August and that same afternoon we all set off to see the garden I had so lavishly praised. The visit was, if not exactly disastrous, a grievous let-down. The famed border had gone to pot. It was all rather like praising some exceedingly beautiful girl and then finding her, in the flesh, to be nothing but a slut and a slattern. Great was the disappointment of my friends.

All this prompts me to go back to a favourite theme of mine, for the repetition of which I make no apology. It is the theme of 'the garden's gone to pot in August'. Now I firmly contend, as readers of this column will know, that no garden should be allowed to go to pot in August and that any gardener who lets it do so is totally unworthy of being called a gardener.

In one of her many books, Gertrude Jekyll, that great old gardener, devotes two chapters to describing her borders in September and October. These, in their full autumn glory, were a sight to behold, as photographs of them testify, and it was a study of these that long ago caused me to plan my own borders to come into full flowering later and continue longer and longer.

Space won't allow me here to tell of all that was flowering so richly in my garden on that lovely October day. But they included many of the most precious treasures—*Aster frikartii*, *Nicotiana Lime Green*, *Verbena venosa*, *Verbena bonariensis*, *Fuchsia thalia*, various potentillas, *Sedum Autumn Joy*, certain rudbeckias and all manner of silver-leaved things—that I have mentioned before and make no apology for doing so again. All these have one great virtue

## From My Garden by H.E. Bates



## The best is yet to be

This month H. E. Bates looks back to an autumn day when his garden was at its peak, and suggests plants to choose for a prolonged display in your own garden

two of the most beautiful appear to be least mentioned. One of these, *H. lancifolia*, is most certainly the best flowering one of the entire family, its soft lilac being prolific from late July to early October. And since this excellent thing is tolerant of both shade and sun it is possible to prolong even that long span of flowering by planting some groups in sun and some in shade.

The other hosta not often seen is *H. plantaginea*, which comes from China, is sometimes called the Corfu lily and has milky white flowers borne well above palest green leaves. This has two great virtues. It is the latest of all the hostas to flower, not starting until September, and it is also fragrant, its scent being rich and delicate, rather like that of certain lilies.

Moral of the story: there's no need to let your garden go to pot in August.

I suggest you include some of the plants I have mentioned in your spring planting programme and you'll find, as my borders proved on that exquisite October morning, the poet was right when he said 'the best is yet to be.'

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in common. Their flowering life is marvellously, wonderfully protracted. (They are not difficult to grow, and could all be planted this spring to flower in the summer.)

The verbenas, for example, will flower for nearly six months, certainly without question for five. The sedum, from the moment its lime green buds begin to form and then to be touched with pink and finally to become a deep wine-red, will hold its flower-heads all winter, when they become a soft, deep mahogany.

There were however some treasures in bloom on that exceptional morning that I haven't mentioned. In one of Miss Jekyll's photographs she shows begonias interplanted with bergenias, so that it looks as if the bergenias were flowering for a second time. Quite by accident I did the same thing with bergenias and one of the herbaceous clematis, *C. integrifolia*. This has small flowers of a delicious forget-me-not blue and in previous years had, with me, been inclined to flop about, so that I unwisely staked it, which was ugly. Last year I left the clematis to its own devices and it responded by falling into the arms of the bergenia, so that again it looked as if the bergenia was having a second flowering, in this case of purest blue. Its own flower, appearing in the spring, is rosy-purple.

Much has been written, in recent years, of hostas, but I am continually astonished that