

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and  
Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1972.



## From My Garden by H.E. Bates

Picture that flat, fascinating sea country, running westwards from Hythe in Kent to the hill on which stands Rye in Sussex, and inland to where a ridge above Appledore at last breaks the rich sheep pasture. Imagine the deserted stretches of inland shingle, and the criss-crossing of dykes feathered with reeds and illuminated by purple loosestrife and tall, mauve-pink marsh mallows as delicate as wild hollyhocks. This is the place that inspired the phrase 'five continents and Romney Marsh'.

A unique, separate land, in other words, that now inspires my title: *The sea shore is also a garden*. Here, inland from the actual shore, kingfishers dart like blue and copper streaks of fire along the dykes, herons poise as if frozen among the reeds and swans sail over on almost savage wings. Here too, on the famous strong Marsh soil, flower life is rich, the loosestrife and marsh mallows being particularly splendid. But it comes as no little surprise to find that the great stretches of dry sand and shingle, which look as if they couldn't support as much as a handful of chickweed, have a correspondingly rich flower life, though vastly different in character, of their own.

When I say vastly different, I refer to the fact that the sea shore has much the same effect on flowers as altitude. The sea-change they suffer rarefies them, reducing them mostly to miniatures, like Alpines. How many of these sea shore flowers the coasts of Britain support I have no real idea, but I judge their name to be Legion. There are certainly more than thirty bearing the prefix 'sea', and two with the prefix 'sea-side', these being the sea-side pansy, *Viola curtisii*, with charming yellow flowers, and the sea-side crowfoot, *Ranunculus baudotii*, which grows in brackish water.

Among these shore flowers I have several special favourites, of which one, *Geranium Lancastriense*, is a little aristocrat good enough for any garden. This loveliest of plants, with its flowers of tenderest rose-pink veined with deeper red, doesn't grow on our southern shores, but confines itself to the coast of Lancashire, hence its name. Hardly ever out of flower from spring to late autumn, it is entirely a no-problem plant, for ever well-behaved and coming true from seed, and no garden should be without it.

Two further favourites of mine and equally lovely, both growing on the Romney coast, are the magnificent sea poppy, *Papaver glaucium flavum*, or horned poppy, with its rich,



### The sea shore is also a garden

With work in his garden practically at a standstill, H. E. Bates writes this month of the garden which fringes our coastline

near-orange flowers and deep-cut grey-green leaves. This, too, is hardly ever out of flower from early summer to October and is always specially lovely in August. (But not for the garden, please. It revels in a starvation diet on shingle.) The second aristocratic beauty is the sea bindweed (not to be condemned with the hated garden weed), *Colystegia soldanella*, with its huge, soft pink trumpets softly veined with white, assuredly one of the loveliest of its tribe.

I have much affection also for two blue beauties, the striking sea holly, *Eryngium maritimum*, which, with its sharp prickly foliage, looks as if scissored out of bright blue steel, and Viper's Bugloss, *Echium vulgare*, which also loves the starvation of shingle. High in my affections too is the sea pink, *Armeria maritima*, which of course isn't a pink at all and is probably better known to you as thrift. Great drifts of its little pink hat-pins, looking almost like everlasting flowers, light up the shores all spring and summer long.

The shingle shore is also a vegetable garden. Sea kale is not so called for nothing. With its plentiful white flowers it is a handsome rather than a pretty plant but it too has an effect of illumination. It is said to have been introduced to Covent Garden from the coasts of Cornwall in 1795. Asparagus is also a maritime plant and consequently, when cultivated, revels in annual dressings of salt. The coasts of Cornwall, Guernsey and Wales (appropriately enough) support wild leeks. There is also a wild carrot and a sea-hogs fennel, both growing near the sea.

I have left till almost last a plant that doesn't fall into any of the categories mentioned. This is sea buckthorn, an extraordinarily handsome shrub with silvery-green leaves and insignificant greenish flowers which eventually undergo the most wonderful of sea-changes, turning to splendid orange berries which fairly set on fire the sand dunes, where, especially in Northern France, it loves to grow.

Finally, I sometimes see on the shore flowers that aren't flowers at all: sea anemones, so aptly named, blossoming on black rocks above clear still pools; or starfish looking like pink sunflowers. And in the mauve and pink and white and yellow scatterings of shells I see flower faces that remind me of the Virginia stocks I grew as a child.

Yes, the sea shore is also a garden! □□

© Evensford Productions Ltd, 1972