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From My Garden by H.E. Bates



When not writing novels, H. E. Bates likes gardening. In his monthly feature he shares his pleasure with us

I wrote not long ago of late joys in the garden, of plants, both perennial and annual, that not only flower late but long, thus extending the life and colour of beds and borders by as much as four months.

Such things as *Verbena venosa*, *Verbena bonariensis*, *Aster frikartii*, *Sedum Autumn Joy* and those spectacular and aptly-named *Rudbeckias* *Gloriosa* are only a few of these trustworthy and long-enduring plants, so much to be preferred, in my estimation, to such things as lupins, paeonies, pyrethrums and many other early summer subjects which, lovely as they are, are short lived and leave great gaping gaps that are difficult to fill.

I now turn to late shrubs, of which there are more than you might think. Some are highly desirable, some magnificent and one, at least, in several varieties, is surely the longest-flowering shrub of the year. I refer to the shrub *Potentilla*. There are many varieties of *P. fruticosa*, some flowering for six months and one, at least, from spring to autumn. They range in colour from the pure yellow of *Farreri* to *Tangerine*, with the paler intermediate tone of *Moonlight* and *Mandshurica*. All are immensely floriferous and desire no cossetting or fuss.

In another recent article I mentioned the shrub mallows but there is no harm in mentioning them again. *Hibiscus syriacus* has been known in these islands since at least the sixteenth century but there are now numbers of excellent new hybrids of it. All have the characteristic hibiscus-like flowers, all are well-behaved, needing little or no pruning, and all flower late—in August and September. *Blue Bird* is a deep blue mauve with a crimson base blotch; *Coeleste* is not unlike it; *Snow*

Drift speaks for itself; *W. R. Smith* is also white; *rubis Woodbridge* is a handsome deep rich red. All like plenty of sun.

I am not greatly in love with hydrangeas, perhaps because they don't love me very much, but I refer only to *H. Hortensia*, the pink, red, blue or white type seen anywhere. But when it comes to the lace-caps, which surprisingly I find much hardier than *H. Hortensia*, I am inclined to go slightly dotty. These are truly delicious. *Blue Wave* and *Blue Bird* speak their own colour, though where the soil contains lime the airy lace-like heads, something like big spiders' webs, will turn a charming shade of pink. All these will make exceedingly handsome shrubs up to 9ft tall and all strike with the greatest of ease from late summer cuttings. *H. Paniculata*, with its huge conical white flowers, is a worthy member of this late-flowering brotherhood, flowering in September and looking, from a distance, more like a prolific bush of lilac.

I have also mentioned quite often before *Abutilon megapotamicum*, a climber or semi-climber having exquisite Chinese lanterns in yellow, red and black. The plant, coming as it does from Brazil, is reputedly not very hardy, but in the south it is certainly hardier than might be expected. It roots so easily in any case that you can always keep a stock of cuttings in the cool house.

All these remarks apply to another quite charming family, the *Abelias*, so called because they are named after a plant collector named *Abel*, who made some intrepid journeys to China in the end part of the nineteenth century, bringing back several species of them. These medium-sized shrubs, flowering in August and September, have mostly pink, white or pink-white flowers, small in themselves but in their massed clusters extremely attractive. *A. grandiflora* and *A. triflora* (some forms are very fragrant) are probably the hardiest of the genus.

I have left until last what I feel to be the most magnificent of all late-flowering shrubs, the *Eucryphias*. One at least of these might well claim, in fact, to be the most exquisite shrub of the year. *E. glutinosa* makes a partially evergreen shrub (the otherwise dark green leaves are a pretty gold and red in autumn) up to 10ft high, bearing waxy chalice of purest white with central anthers just touched with yellow. This aristocrat, flowering in August and September, is in every way superb and moreover the hardiest of the family. (Also good, though not quite so good, is *E. nymansensis*, so called because it was raised at the Countess of Rosse's garden, Nymans in Sussex.) I have just bought an *E. glutinosa* for myself—long may its celestial beauty flourish.

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