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I often amuse myself by wondering what we gardeners would do if, by some cruel stroke of fate, we were completely deprived of all the plants we know as garden varieties. Would it be possible, or profitable, to replace them with those we know as wild?

I think it would; the idea is by no means fantastic. We are richly endowed with native flora. (Isn't there a passage in Tacitus telling of how, when the Romans first landed here, they walked everywhere on glorious carpets of wild flowers?) We are also as richly blessed in the matter of climate, though there are people who stubbornly refuse to admit it. I can't begin to list here more than a fraction of the several thousand wild species that flourish in these islands; nor is it my idea that we should plant beds of buttercups and daisies, lovely and lovable though they may be. My mind is on rarer things.

Did you know, for instance, that we have a wild tulip? It's called *T. sylvestris*, a most beautiful thing that looks like a butter-yellow fritillary. Or a wild lily, the enchanting yellow and purple Turk's cap; or a wild gladiolus, *G. illyricus*? We also have five species of wild narcissi, though one is probably a garden escape; one wild snowdrop and two snowflakes; three wild crocuses; no less than ten gentians or gentianellas; more than 20 species of viola; an equal number of wild saxifrages; several species of iris, including our lovely yellow water iris and that unfortunately-named *Iris foetidissima*, which has insignificant flowers but delightful orange autumn berries; and half a dozen primulas, including of course our precious and beloved primrose, the cowslip, which alas is growing rarer and rarer, and not least the rare sweet oxlip.

We have wild lily of the valley, too, and three sorts of Solomon's seal. Of salvias we have four, including a great favourite of mine, *S. pratensis*, and nearly 20 geraniums, including two other favourites of mine, the delicate pink *G. Lancastriense* and the blue *G. pratense*, neither of which would disgrace any garden; and then one of the most delicious things of all, *Anemone pulsatilla*, the pasque flower, now called *Pulsatilla vulgaris*, which if I may say so is a damn silly name for so ethereal a thing.

Nor would your garden be disgraced



## Wild Flowers

This month our favourite novelist writes about some of the many beautiful wild flowers that are still to be found in our countryside

by H. E. Bates



by our two green-flowered hellebores, or your water-garden by our four balsams, our two water-lilies or those delightful mimulus, yellow and yellow spotted with red, commonly known as musk or monkey flower.

The North Downs, which rise to the east and north of my garden, are uncommonly rich in flora, some of which are so rare that I won't even begin to breathe their names. But I well remember, long ago, walking there with my two small daughters and coming upon a wild columbine, *Aquilegia vulgaris*, with its dark maroon granny bonnets, which they told their teacher about, only to receive a snort from that disbelieving woman, with the crushing retort that 'such things don't grow wild in England'. Oh but they do!

These same Downs also give us our lovely yellow rockrose, of which there are four species altogether. They also support our wild yellow snapdragon, our wild evening primrose and several species of mullein (*verbascum*).

And what of pinks and pansies? Of the first we have five species, including the famed Cheddar pink, found in the gorge of that name, and the wild pink, which is the origin of the garden pink. As to violas (commonly violets and pansies) we are indeed rich. There is no better-loved flower than our native sweet violet, both dark purple and white, but I also confess to a soft spot for what I call our two cornfield pansies, *V. arvensis* and *V. tricolor*, with their cheeky, mocking, endearing little faces. The very mention of these causes me to pause in order to lament the passing of two favourites, the cornflower and the corn cockle. Both have succumbed to the scythe of cultivation and what is fondly known as progress.

And what of orchids and roses? Here too we are richly endowed: a dozen species of one and more than 20 of the other. The roses you may see almost everywhere and also some of the orchids; but for the most part the rarer orchids have had their lovely lights hidden with jealous care, thank Heaven, under carefully guarded bushes. These are probably the rarest of all our glorious heritage of wild flowers; and may their names, which as I say I daren't breathe, live for ever.

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Flowers in the drawing: salvia, cowslip, viola, pasque flower and rose.