

Growing 'Flowers for Picking' from Seed

Jo Howe

This year I committed myself to providing and arranging flowers for our church's flower festival at the beginning of July. I grew a selection of annuals and perennials in an effort to have lots of flowers to choose from. The seeds were planted in early March and, this year at least, I probably started most of them about a month too late (although the lack of sun and warmth this summer may have had something to do with this). I planted the seeds of:

Carnation Stripes and Picotees (T & M) and Dianthus 'Sonata' Mixed (T & M), both of which are described as flowering in the first year, although perennials. The carnations flowered from the end of July until early October and were very nice indeed. These were the ones so admired by our Hardy Planters when I brought them for the display at the end of August. Of the *Dianthus*, about half flowered in August/September, but I found them disappointing - all very purpley/pink shades with rather messy flowers. They have made excellent healthy plants going into the winter however, whilst the carnations, having flowered their socks off, are now not looking so good, and it's probably not worth saving the plants for next year.

Cosmos 'Psyche' (Mr Fothergill) - the only thing which flowered in time for the flower festival, but the flowers didn't last well in water. Perhaps I should have conditioned them in some way?

Sweet Sultan Amberboa moschata mixed (Mr Fothergill) - lovely flowers on the weediest plants imaginable. Most of the plants died - slowly! I got 2 flowers (sometimes only 1) at a time for about 6 weeks, so I won't grow these again.

Didiscus 'Blue Lace' (Sarah Raven) - gorgeous blue flowers on sturdy, attractively cut-leaved plants, about 12-18 inches high. Worth any trouble. I think I let mine dry out a bit towards the end of summer and I neglected to deadhead them, and then a mole undermined the plants and they turned red and died, but I still have some seed in the fridge and I shall grow them again next year. In fact, I might grow a full row in the veg patch, so that I can pick them every week all summer!

I hope this very limited experience will be of interest - several people asked for the name of the carnations, and in spite of being marketed by the most expensive seed company known to me, I can wholeheartedly recommend them as being worth every penny. I had enough flowers to give a good display in troughs on the terrace throughout the second half of the summer (although they did need some support) and from the 12 plants I grew, I picked a bunch a week, sometimes two.