

Making our Garden

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The earliest recollection of gardening I have is, at about five or six years old, when my father gave me a little patch of his garden and a few packets of seeds, one of which I remember was *Calendula*. To watch seeds grow and flower amazed and excited me then, and still does.

In 1987 my wife and I were looking to buy a country weekend cottage as a break from the daily commuting into London from our home in Hertfordshire. As we had friends living in Gloucestershire it gave us a chance to search in this area. Eventually we found a suitable place that had enough land to make a garden, though the house was rather more than a small cottage. We made an offer and it was accepted, this was a bold step as neither of us had any chance of an early retirement.

The next few months were spent with weekend trips, bringing plants from our garden and the next door neighbour's garden that the owners had leased to us. Fortunately, within a year we were both able to obtain early retirement from our employment and moved in permanently.

The land round the house was about an acre, divided through the middle by a small brook. We also had the opportunity to purchase a further three and a half acres of adjoining land with the brook continuing to divide the additional land into two halves, one half was an open field, the other overgrown with thick brambles and other undesirables.

First we designed and built the area in the immediate vicinity of the house to include a pond and two bridges across the brook. The borders and beds were designed to create interest for a long season, the colour combinations were mainly my wife's work as she has a good eye for putting the right ones in the most effective way. We used the banks of the brook and the wet areas to plant marginals, especially candelabra primulas.

Gradually the extended area was cleared to make way for an arboretum which was planted with about 400 trees and shrubs that were native to various parts of the temperate world. It was a pleasant surprise to find that the ground had wild daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) and early spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*).



The ground beneath the deciduous trees was planted with several types of *Galanthus* which quite soon carpeted the ground, followed by Hellebores. A few

different types of Hellebores were purchased including some double and anemone flowered forms. I have enjoyed hybridising some of them so that now we have quite a large collection of different forms and colours. Unfortunately, this is a slow process as it means a wait of about seven or eight years from seed to flower before selecting the best to keep.



Other woodland plants in which I have taken a particular interest, are North American Erythroniums and Trilliums, and once again I became bitten by the bug of propagating some of them. An example of the *Trillium* hybrids are some crosses between two of the Pedicel forms, *T.*



sulcatum and *T. flexipes*. Whilst, once again, it is a case of a long wait from seed to flower, I found that it is possible to save one year of time by taking the seed just before it is fully ripe and still green, this way they will germinate and produce a radical the first year; this also applies to most primulas.



Some of the plants that I find interesting in the arboretum are an area of Rhododendrons followed by deciduous Azaleas. On the opposite side of a path are a collection of over sixty different Hydrangeas, *H. aspera*, *H. macrophylla*, and *H. paniculata*, which continue the display into summer and autumn. There is a *Davidia involucrata* with its mass of handkerchief-like bracts, and turning left, there are several Magnolias, from the large flowered *M. x 'Eric Savill'* and *M. 'Gold Star'* to *M. sieboldii*. and others. Entering on to a long path, with a large ornamental urn at the end to create a focal point, there are various shrubs and trees, *Quercus rubra aurea*, *Q. cerris 'Variegata'*, *Q. phellos*, that looks like a willow, *Q. palustris* (pin oak) and the evergreen *Q. ilex* (Holm oak). There is a strong scent of toffee or candy floss, which is produced by *Cercidiphyllum pendulum* when the leaves turn to pink and gold in the autumn. Different Viburnums provide scent from spring to summer.

The path continues past *Gymnocladus dioicus* (Kentucky coffee tree), three *Catalpa* trees, the golden leaved *C. bignonioides 'Aurea'*, *C. b. 'Variegata'* and *C. b. 'Purpurea'*. In front of these are *Halesia carolina*, the beautiful snowdrop tree and *Heptacodium miconoides*. In a close area there are two *Staphylea*; *S. colchica* (Bladder nut) and *S. holocarpa 'Rosea'*, a showy shrub with many pink flowers. An unusual plant is *Sinocalycanthus* that has large white flowers with a yellow centre, introduced by Roy Lancaster. There are two hybrids of *Sinocalycanthus* that have been crossed with the American *Calycanthus*. *C. 'Hartlage Wine'* is a very good plant with a large deep red flower and white centre that seems to continue flowering from spring to autumn. The other hybrid is *C. 'Venus'*, a somewhat poorer white flower with a red centre.

Liriodendron tulipifera 'Aureomarginatum' (Tulip tree) is now a very large tree with oddly shaped leaves, and flowers reminiscent of tulips, though the tree is actually in the Magnoliaceae family. Along a lower path we have planted a group of Acers, *A. palmatum* varieties, for brilliant autumn colour, *A. davidii* and *A. pennsylvanicum* for their coloured striped bark and two very brightly coloured bark and coloured leaf small trees, *A. conspicum 'Red Flamingo'* and *A. conspicum 'Phoenix'*, *A. griseum* is grown for its cinnamon-coloured flaking, curled bark and *A. rubra 'October Glory'* for its fire red foliage in the autumn. Returning towards the house there is an unusual *Fothergillia 'Blue Shadow'* with blue leaves, and two unusual *Styrax* shrubs *S. japonicus 'Pink Chimes'* and *S. 'Evening Light'* with dark red leaves.