

My Summer Stars

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I started thinking about this article with a view to writing about some of my favourite summer flowers but as summer progressed it became horribly apparent that some of the flowers I had fondly imagined I could enthuse about were actually dead! So this is a wander around the plants which have done well in my garden in spite of the long, cold, wet winter, the very delayed spring and the blisteringly hot dry summer of 2018 that has followed.

At the time of writing (early August) we have still not had any significant rainfall. I must say that a lot of shrubs have been amazing this year. Without doubt the roses have been the stars of the garden, blooming almost continuously for three months so far. Not only have they bloomed beautifully but I have had much less blackspot than in previous years. If I had to choose the best this year I would say that the so-called ground cover roses have excelled (sorry, don't know most of their names), but also relative newcomer '*For Your Eyes Only*' which is an amazing apricot pink floribunda, fading to paler pink with a dark eye and a delicate perfume. *Rosa 'Bonica'* has also flowered nonstop with delicate pink flowers and very healthy foliage.

Honeysuckles, especially the wild plants, have been wonderful too and even among the wild plants there are different varieties so that there is a long flowering season. *Lonicera japonica 'Mint Crisp'* is a vigorous semi-evergreen variety with pale green and darker green marbled leaves and white and gold scented flowers which are still flowering freely.

On the subject of perfume, all the *Philadelphus* were the best they've been for years. *Philadelphus 'Belle Etoile'* has masses of white flowers, each at least five centimetres across, grows about two metres tall and seems to be happy growing just about anywhere. *Philadelphus 'Virginal'* has double flowers and grows to a similar size. However, I think my favourite this year is *Philadelphus coronarius 'Variegatus'*. It was smothered in highly fragrant single white flowers but the white-edged foliage makes it stand out for months when it's not in flower.

Many of my Hydrangeas have drooped sadly this year but two which don't seem to have suffered are two black-stemmed varieties, the stunning blue-flowered *Hydrangea macrophylla 'Black Steel Blue'* and red-flowered *Hydrangea macrophylla 'Zorro'*. Both are magnificent in part shade and don't seem to mind that the ground is quite dry where they are.

I should mention that although many of my herbaceous perennials have suffered horribly there are a few which stand out for not having minded the drought at all. Several varieties of *Leucanthemum* have flowered profusely and the taller ones have not needed staking this year for the first time ever. Heleniums have also flowered happily for weeks and have carried on even when I have felt too hot and tired to bother dead-heading them! Inulas have glowed in the borders with golden flowers and so have several Rudbeckias. In fact, I think the various daisies have been my star performers in the heat and drought. I think we would all agree that this year's weather has been challenging, to say the least, but the aforementioned plants certainly rose to the challenge. And I believe rain is now forecast for my area!