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Eye-ful, or awful?

Judy Harry
relishes colour – in
the best possible
taste, naturally!

Fig. 1 Sitting outside having our coffee...

Sitting outside having sour coffee on a balmy early summer morning, the peace was broken by my husband remarking how nice an overwintered marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) looked because it helped to counteract the predominant shades of mauve in that part

of the garden (fig. 1). Since I had been meaning to pull it out for some time, and he rarely comments on any aspect of the ornamental garden, this came as quite a shock. I was rather in love with the subtle and harmonious picture of mauve Sweet Rocket (*Hesperis*

matronalis), *Allium cristophii*, *Erigeron flettii*, Opium Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) et al in the garden at that time. It was all very relaxing and certainly in the best possible taste; but obviously I had rather overdone it (fig. 2).

The contrast of mauve and orange is of course one of the classics of colour-wheel theoreticians.



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I am never quite sure that I grasp the whole business but, like the visitor to the art gallery, I know what I like – which is probably what works in terms of the colour wheel.

Fig. 2 Obviously I had rather overdone it.

What was wrong here was to do with balance: there was too much mauve and not enough orange, and the orange had little to back it up. Originally more attention had been paid to the balance of colour, with plenty of orange being provided by the lovely but wayward *Papaver rupifragum* (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 The lovely but wayward *Papaver rupifragum*.

This seeds freely, but as is often the way with free-seeders, having once lived in a spot, it moves on to somewhere fresh; thankfully a healthy specimen has since reappeared in the right spot. Then at the AGM Lecture Day I spied a tiny plant of the double, burnt-apricot *Helianthemum* 'Ilma's Master' on the Nottingham Group's plant stall and it was bought and carefully added. It was a new entry in the 2006/7 *Plant Finder* but is now not listed and is scarce enough to have been offered in Plant Heritage's Plant Exchange Scheme. Just the sort of plant to get a Hardy Planter excited! (fig 4.)

Imagine my joy when at the West Yorkshire Group Biennial Lecture Day I spied a big potful of *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' (fig. 5) to back it up. This is much subtler than

its name suggests, bearing orange-washed gold flowers all summer long. Going to these lecture days is such a rewarding pastime! The newcomers should be set off nicely by an established ever-bronze *Carex* under which one year a pheasant brooded a clutch of eggs. I hadn't realised what was going on until, weeding very close to the spot, out of the corner of my eye I saw the clump of fine bronze foliage appear to get up and hurry away (fig. 6). Thankfully she came back and brought up her chicks. Let's hope my endeavours are as successful.

Many years ago I had enormous fun planting up a 'hot', west-facing border, where rich red, scarlet and orange were anchored by some dark-foliaged shrubs. At the time it was regarded as being a bit radical; now



Fig. 4 Just the sort of plant to get a Hardy Planter excited!

it's almost a cliché, but I like it.

Bold colours are in fact well represented in the garden. So it was that I was able to gather, in the third week of November 2014, a gloriously incendiary jugful. This was thanks in part to the very mild autumn, but also to my efforts in adding more rich reds to the original planting.

Among the reds was *Gaillardia x grandiflora* 'Burgunder' (fig. 7), mail-ordered in a fit of recklessness several years ago which started the process of rejuvenating this border. Although not exactly true to the colourful catalogue description (some of the

plants are *G. x grandiflora* 'Kobold'), they have nevertheless proved to be more or less perennial and they produce masses of flowers, which of course make very good cut flowers, well into the autumn. Their seedheads are also very appealing.

I had seen a photo of *Rosa* 'Hot Chocolate' (fig. 8) in another catalogue and, finding the subtle brown-red flowers absolutely irresistible, with uncharacteristic liberality I bought and planted it. Nearby is a plant of the shrubby *Salvia* 'Royal Bumble', originating from the Netherlands and given to me by a generous friend; it has proved to be a compact and non-stop summer bloomer. All the shrubby ones I have seem to overwinter, but I do make sure to have back-up plants under cover¹. The 2014 Pulmonaria Group Day visit to Norwell Nurseries provided me with an opportunity to buy *Alstroemeria* 'Tanya'² (fig. 9). This is one of the taller varieties from Parigo's nursery near Chichester, and in its first season it flowered for weeks and cut well. The tomato-red flowers on metre-tall stems have a slight wash of raspberry which gives them great depth. Thanks to the mild weather, they were all still in flower when the bronze-red first flowers of *Chrysanthemum* 'Chelsea Physic Garden' (fig. 10) reached their peak, the chrysanthemum flowers both redder and fuller than I'd ever remembered them.



Fig. 5 A clump of fine bronze foliage got up and hurried away...

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Fig. 6 Working on the colour balance: *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' with temporary support from an annual, *Ursinia calenduliflora*.

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Fig. 7 *Gaillardia x grandiflora* 'Burgunder' flowers profusely and has appealing seedheads.

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¹It is easy to become addicted to these rewarding plants. Visit www.dysonsalsvias.com if you dare, to see the range offered by William Dyson at his nursery in the grounds of Great Comp gardens.

²I was gratified to hear the respected plantswoman Helen Dillon make a case for alstroemerias.

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Fig. 8 The delicious rose 'Hot Chocolate' was irresistible.

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Fig. 9 *Alstroemeria* 'Tanya' flaunting her colours with Opium Poppy back-up.

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Fig. 10 Late-flowering plants like the very hardy *Chrysanthemum* 'Chelsea Physic Garden' are just getting into their stride in late October/November.

The whole bunch was topped off with the magnificent split-open seed pods of *Iris foetidissima* and big red hips from *Rosa* 'White Cockade' (fig. 11). This very reliable, clean-white-flowered climber always fruits well, extending its season of interest until I prune it in early spring.

Interestingly, pruning in 2015 revealed that there were hips on roses I had never seen bearing fruit before. This was a great bonus, because in recent years I have taken to saving them, either hanging them up in a bunch somewhere or putting them in a pot outside as 'an arrangement'. Originally

I had some hazy idea that the birds would appreciate my thrifty attitude, but in reality it is me who enjoys the hips' persistence.

Earlier in the season in this border there are several crocosmias, starting with the old favourite 'Lucifer'. They would all do better if conditions in this west-facing border were damper but the leaky hose, fed from a water butt, doesn't really moisten the soil enough. I was afraid when I put a gift of *Euphorbia griffithii* 'Fireglow' here that it too would find it too dry for comfort. But it has established well, and if its spreading tendencies are curbed a little it won't be altogether a bad thing.

I would love to have some bold patches of scarlet *Monarda* in this border, but experience suggests that conditions are probably not consistently moist enough to keep mildew away. However, having read on the internet that the red *M.* 'Jacob Cline' was resistant to mildew, when I saw a wonderful potful of this variety on a stall at the Annual Lecture Day it had to be bought³. I would also like to think that some of the subtle red yarrows (*Achillea*) could be added; the lack of moisture ought to suit them wonderfully. I still carry in my mind's eye a planting of *A. millefolium* 'Red Velvet' growing amongst *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldtau' at Harlow Carr (fig. 12), but experience has shown that while the lack of

³As soon as I'd bought this plant, the first person I met said that hers got mildew

moisture in my soil might be right, it is really too heavy to suit yarrows. They inevitably fade away, which is frustrating.

At the front of this border, lolling over the path, is a bright orange-red *Helianthemum* 'Henfield Brilliant' and its neighbour the later-flowering *Zauschneria californica* 'Dublin' (fig. 13). They loll because, as usual, I planted them much too near the front so that they cover half the path. Both must like being in the sucked-dry soil in front of a well-established *Berberis thunbergii* f. *atropurpurea* 'Helmond Pillar'. More dark foliage is provided by *Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diabolo', whose berries also provide red colouring on mature flowering stems.



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Fig. 11 This healthy climber *Rosa* 'White Cockade' gives pleasure later with huge persistent scarlet hips.



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Fig. 12. I would love to be able to achieve this combination of *Achillea millefolium* 'Red Velvet' with *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldtau'.



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Fig. 13 Revelling in a baked and sunny situation, *Zauschneria californica* 'Dublin' is a useful late-summer-flowering plant.



Fig. 14 *Tulipa* 'Ballerina' partnered by the glossy stands of Dyer's Weld, *Reseda luteola*.

If hard-pruned each year, of course, this shrub becomes primarily a foliage plant. Which is how *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva' is treated here, so that it produces a metre-tall fountain of intricate and very shiny black foliage.

Over the years I have planted tulips in this border, especially rich red- and orange-flowered varieties, among which I think the scented lily-flowered 'Ballerina' is probably my favourite (fig. 14); happily it flowers just as *Geum rivale* 'Marmalade' (fig. 15) is opening its nodding blooms. By one of the laws of illogicality, the fact that the soil here is too dry for *Crocsmia* strangely does not make it the sort of place where tulips persist. However, I have noticed that elsewhere in the

garden the one spot where very-long-established bulbs of *Tulipa* 'Apeldoorn' continue to produce their brilliant scarlet, yellow-and-black-centred flowers is in the bare, dry soil right next to the trunk of a tree. Elsewhere, the heavy cover of foliage, and probably careless prodding with a border fork (fig. 16), has led to their dying out almost entirely. So it was with great interest that I heard Kevin Hughes, in a talk on bulbs, say that tulips will do really well planted on the south side of trees and shrubs, even leylandii hedges, where the soil is dry and baked. He also said, which made us all sit up, that the best time to plant tulips is in January, as the bulbs will establish better, be less affected by late frosts and be generally healthier (fig. 17).



Fig. 15 The *rivale* type *Geum* 'Marmalade' has been a reliable late-spring performer for me for years.

I immediately regretted passing by the bins of reduced tulip bulbs at the garden centre only a few days before his talk.

It also made me realise that the tulips I had planted the previous autumn at what I thought was 'the right time' had probably been consigned to a less than ideal regime.



Fig. 16 Careless prodding with the border fork.



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Fig. 17 The best time to plant tulips is in January.

Where had they been planted? In the overwhelmingly tasteful mauve part of the garden, of course. What colour are they? Every colour imaginable! One gloomy day in September, my usually sedate consideration of detergent, strong flour, and 5-a-day fruit and vegetables in the supermarket had been enlivened by succumbing to a bargain bag of mixed May-flowering tulips.

They were bought to give this border what is now frequently referred to in interior design circles as a 'pop' of colour. Who comes up with these words? They were not intended to be anything as restricted as a pop and in due course they produced a gloriously childish blast of bright paintbox colours which lasted for weeks and weeks (figs 18 & 19).



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Fig. 18 Another way of expressing the child in oneself: at Hall Farm in Lincolnshire, Pam Tatum has sown colourful annuals beside a mown meadow path.



Fig. 19 A gloriously childish blast.

Judy Harry, aided and abetted by the artistry of Twink Addison, is probably moving happily towards a second childhood. However she hopes to give the impression of being mature and sensible when required.