



Fig. 1 *Hemerocallis* 'Whichford'

I grew up with a load of brothers and male cousins, so although I never got to bat in cricket I will watch anything if there's a moving ball. One of my favourite sayings, straight from the mouth of golfer Tiger Woods, is "It is what it is". Well this year has certainly been "what it is" – a scorcher. My own garden was without rain for close on fifty days, but then we often miss the rain on top of the Cotswolds when southerlies blow. The rain soaks anywhere west of the River Severn and drifts up the eastern side of Britain, leaving a dry gap in the heart of England.

When the heatwave started I assumed that it wouldn't last and by the time I realised it was here to stay the garden was in trouble. It was too late for the phloxes, but there are always winners and losers. I grow a lot of roses in the summer border and, dare I say it, some are

floribundas! All my roses have loved the hot weather, although the trusses of flowers came out early and all at once. I normally cut a lot for Hampton Court Flower Show in early July, because I give talks at the Rose Festival, but even the hybrid musks like 'Buff Beauty', normally so good in July, had already finished.

Roses can definitely stand the heat in the kitchen. I remember visiting South Africa and seeing standard 'Iceberg' roses with stems like tree trunks; here it's a miserable rose for most of us. If these summers become the norm, a backbone of roses may be the answer. Go for paler ones though. The petals don't absorb as much heat as the reds and murrey-purples. This year dark roses were frazzled and dried by mid-June, so if you're adding a rose to a south-facing sunny wall I'd definitely go for a pale one. I'm taken

with a single-flowered Harkness climber called *The Simple Life*, which reminds me of another single-flowered rose called 'Sally Holmes', although that's a shrub. Both have a big boss of rose-gold stamens and the petals, larger than those of a dog rose, fade to clotted cream. *The Simple Life* is a personal favourite of Philip Harkness; it's extremely healthy, and free-flowering from early to late in the season.

Daylilies, or *Hemerocallis*, have also thrived in the heat, but I've noticed the colours have been much more intense than usual. I know daylily enthusiasts won't thank me for mentioning these oldies but they're great garden plants. 'Red Precious' (sometimes sold by Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers) was raised by R H Coe in England in 1968, especially to thrive in British weather conditions.

The learning curve

Val Bourne

It has produced far more flower this year, and each bloom is a much deeper tomato-red. 'Whichford' (fig. 1), a classic pallid yellow raised by Harry Randall in 1960, has also loved this summer. I admire its foliage which has a darkly shaded base, and its elegant flowers have a slight touch of green in the throat and aren't brash. It has a good scent too. The foliage doesn't seem to spoil – that's the biggest problem with 'Green Flutter', it carries brown leaves.

I've still got time for 'Stafford', a daylily raised by Randolph in 1959. It flowers reliably here whatever the weather. Although 'Stafford' and 'Whichford' both had RHS AGMs, recently a panel of experts has rescinded both. Sad news, because both are great garden plants. 'Berlin Red' has been recommended by the gardener in charge of the stock beds at the Beth Chatto Gardens, Marc McHearne. He thinks it's better than 'Stafford' and HE probably knows!

Others I admire include 'Flasher' (a warm pumpkin-orange raised by Romine in 1979), 'Primal Scream' (fig. 2) (a vivid but warm orange – Hanson 1994), and upright 'Father James Foster' (deep red with a green throat – Burkey 1989). All have had more-strident colour this year because of the weather; 'Father James Foster' looks almost black in bright sunlight, appropriate given its clerical moniker.

Daylilies are widely planted in warmer parts of Asia and seem to thrive in Thailand and Japanese cities. Their heat tolerance makes them invaluable in the central states of America, where summers are always hot. However American plant breeders love to beef up the chromosome count, using colchicine; they do it with irises too. This is the equivalent of a trout pout: too much interference by mankind and not enough left to nature!

In my garden daylilies haven't been troubled by this year's heat, although they seem to have had more 'big bud' caused by a gall midge. I try to catch this early and hopefully find the grubs before they head towards the soil. The soil might be too hard to penetrate so I'm hoping for less trouble next year.

The other great survivors in my garden have been the eryngiums: I've never had such a steely stand of Miss Willmott's Ghost, *Eryngium giganteum* (fig. 3). This biennial self-seeds in the most inappropriate places. It's completely obstructed the path to the woodland garden, which means I've had to squeeze through a waist-high prickly barrier with watering cans in order to revive some newly-planted ferns and a tall, golden-leaved hydrangea from Hilliers. Called *H. aspera* 'Gold Rush', its foliage is a cool gold in spring, but turns green in



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Fig. 2 *Hemerocallis* 'Primal Scream' at Hampton Court



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Fig. 3 *Eryngium giganteum*, Miss Willmott's Ghost

summer. The flowers in the catalogue are an attractive hydrangea-blue, but I fear they'll probably turn out white on my alkaline to neutral soil.

It matters not, because I'm hoping that in time it will shield my trilliums from May sun, because the walnut tree they're planted underneath comes into leaf too late to protect them. The walnut has benefited from the warm summer sun and is bearing a heavy crop.

I'll have to cull most of my *Eryngium giganteum* before they begin to shed seeds, or the prickly beast will take over! I do allow some seeds to fall where they will, the best way to raise it because, like many successful self-seeders, it's difficult in a pot. Hundreds of you will now tell me how easy it is, but it's not my experience with it, or with the handsome biennial umbellifer *Smyrniium perfoliatum*. Seed-sets have been good this year and I've had far more Sweet William and verbasicum seed than usual, again the result of higher temperatures.

My pots of agapanthus, watered by the Best Beloved, are full of flower, although the flowers tended to screw themselves up in hot sunshine. I'm growing a new one with navy-blue flowers named 'Alan Street' after the person who raised it from seed at Avon Bulbs (fig. 4). He has been the main snowdrop man there for more than 20 years. This

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Fig. 4 Alan Street with his eponymous agapanthus.

agapanthus produces masses of flowers, and is standing out in the current trial at RHS Wisley. Avon Bulbs took 50 plants to Hampton Court, and they sold out in the first day or so. Why is it so good? Well, most dark agapanthus are shy of flowering, so this is set to become a garden classic.

My agapanthus in the

ground are not going to flower because like most South African plants they need moisture; my crocosmias are also awful – they need a wettish summer. We seem to be having more weather extremes. Summer is no longer three fine days and a thunderstorm, but I rather wish it was! 🌸

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