



# The love match

The rose and the clematis make a lovely pair of companions

THE ADAGE “If you count the pennies, the pounds will look after themselves” is as relevant today as it was in post-war Britain. Food is not as scarce as then and there is no food-rationing as such but prudent house-keeping is the name of the game. When I was about four years old I was bribed to be a page at a wedding with the promise of half a Mars Bar which I was to share with my brother Dai if we walked all the way up and down the aisle with the bride and groom. Of course we did exactly what was expected of us. How could we not have – with the thought of such riches at the end of the day. Very soon afterwards I was given my first banana. This further culinary excitement was shared with a little girl who lived nearby. She ran up to her bedroom, locked the door, and ate the whole thing, skin and all.

It makes economic sense to collect seeds from various plants in the garden and now is the time to do it. Where would the border be without all those opium poppies that dot themselves around? *Aquilegia*, foxgloves, hellebores and flowering tobacco behave similarly but you can never be sure what sort of flowers they will produce until they actually open. This, I fear, is the result of living a promiscuous life. The art is to remove the seed heads of flowers that prove less exciting like those of the common foxglove (purple), for example, as opposed to white or pink ones. What I do is to tie red string on stems bearing more interesting flowers before they fade to remind me which plants can be left in situ to ripen and distribute their seed in their own innovative fashion. This is also the time to take (8cm/3”) semi-ripe cuttings of a wide range of shrubs that are easily propagated in a sandy loam in a pot placed outside in semi-shade. If you prop up a clear plastic bag with small canes or twigs there will be less chance of the compost drying out through evaporation.

The garden in August need not look tired and past its best as there are so many plants that can add generous splashes of colour in late summer right into the autumn. I am thinking particularly of two species of clematis, namely *tensexis* and *viticella*. Both are vigorous growers that can easily be trained up small trees like apples, or large shrubs like philadelphus (mock orange) or



Clematis viticella.

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cotinus (smoke bush) to great effect. These particular species of clematis are also very easy to prune. All you have to do is to cut them down to the ground in early winter meaning that you are not left with a dead tangled mess throughout the winter. They never, therefore, swamp their host plant unlike all the other types of clematis that flower earlier in the year which only require a light trim soon after they have finished flowering. The garden to visit to fully appreciate late summer-flowering clematis is the one at Burford House Gardens near Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire. They have a fabulous collection there.

Tennyson wrote “Rose, rose and clematis Trail and twine and clasp and kiss”.

He obviously recognised this plant combination as being a beautiful and classical one, examples of which

are known today as ‘marriage gardening’. One such successful colour combination is the pale apricot flowers of *Rosa* ‘Buff Beauty’ and the blue/purple blooms of *Clematis viticella*. Another, this time using a shrub is silver-leaved *Berberis temolaica* and the deep violet-flowering *Clematis viticella* ‘Etoile Violette’. When it comes to a tree and clematis colour combination there is little to beat the rosey-pink flowers of *Clematis viticella* ‘Abundance’ adorning a *Juniperus* ‘Skyrocket’, or indeed the golden foliage of *Catalpa bignonioides* peppered with the deep red velvet flowers of *Clematis viticella* ‘Royal Velours’.

When planting a clematis with the intention of growing it up a tree, it must be positioned some distance away from the base of the trunk, say one meter (3ft), and then trained up some sort of framework, a long cane or even wire that leans in towards the tree. In the case of a tree that has outer branches close to the ground it will need to be planted even further away. The reason for doing this may seem obvious. It is that the soil further away from a tree is bound to be richer and damper. In any case prepare a nice rich hole for the clematis, remembering they all like a cool root run. Therefore, if the base of the clematis is shaded by another plant, all the better. ■



Foxglove.