

Cotswold Cottage Gardening

Plant with Care!

There are some plants which, however seductive they seem at first acquaintance, should only be planted after serious consideration.

Mind the Mints

Possibly the most aggressive of these apparently ornamental or useful plants are the mints. Arthur Hellyer remarked that variegated 'ginger' mint was his most regretted introduction; it took five minutes to plant, but twenty years later he was still grubbing it out of his flowerbeds. I have a similar problem, which I have compounded by the purchase of silver mint as well. This is a beautiful plant, with soft aromatic silver foliage, and decent-sized spikes of lilac flowers in July - but it bitterly resents sharing a garden with any other plant, encroaching on their territory relentlessly. Mints are particularly difficult to control, because their thick white roots are brittle, and break off as you dig them out; any little piece left behind, it seems, making a new plant. The old advice, about planting culinary mint in a bucket, is just as true for its ornamental cousins. The creeping euphorbia, *E. cyparissias*, is another plant with alarmingly invasive habits. This dwarf species covers the ground with ferny fronds, flushed purple in *E. 'Fens Ruby'*, spangled with lime green flowers in late spring; but it will overflow even established shrubs such as cotinus, sucking the nourishment from the ground around them. *Geranium phaeum* seems to have many virtues: tough, almost evergreen, growing even in quite deep shade, with purple,



spurred, flowers. Beware! This is one of the champion self-seeders of all-time. Even if dead-headed, it will sneak some spare seeds abroad, and before you notice, will have sent a very deep root into the heart of some more prized plant. Removing it means a fair chance of damaging the host, but remove it you must, before it grows like lightning and smothers the spot.

Dangerous Beauties

I love the deep purple orach, which grows to a statuesque four foot, laden with rich drooping sprays of seeds (rather like dock heads, but bigger) tremendous in a vase, as well as a border. But it seeds prolifically, and the unwary can find any blank space carpeted with very vigorous foot - high plants almost overnight. Pull them out immediately- once they get bigger, it is a major task. And finally bluebells-yes, they are very pretty in a wood, where they can do no harm, but a curse in a border. After their brief moment of glory, they die most unattractively, with withered flowers and unsightly foliage excluding light and moisture from any herbaceous plants or seedlings in the vicinity. They hang on to the space so that they can sow their own seed, which germinates with alarming success. So if you feel like succumbing to any of these dangerous beauties, let them know who is master from the start. Confine the roots, deadhead like a fiend, attack with the trowel - or plant something more biddable, and relax.

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