

## Cotswold Cottage Gardening

### ‘She Loves Me, She Loves Me Not’

Daisies are the first flower that most children try to draw; and there is something about that apparently simple shape, the central boss surrounded by rings of petals, that remains in some way the archetype of flowers even for adults. The daisy belongs to the great botanical classification *Asteraceae*, (which used to be known more logically as *Compositae*), taking its name from the fact that the central eye is made up of many tiny ‘flowers’, each of which can form a seed.

#### ‘Daisy, Daisy..’

Although the family includes highly bred and glamorous branches such as *Chrysanthemum* and *Aster* (the Michaelmas daisies of autumn), some of the simpler forms are perhaps the most delightful in the garden.

*Anthemis punctata* gets the season off to a good start, forming a loose mound of dissected silvery foliage, studded with quite large white daisies in May.

*Anthemis tinctoria* has dark green feathery foliage and daisies about 4cm across; the best-known cultivars, ‘Sauce Hollandaise’ and ‘Wargrave’ offer pale yellow flowers, which are an ideal contrast to almost any other colour.

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) seeds about with wild abandon, and can easily give rise to leggy plants with miserably small single daisies; but the yellow-leaved form has sparkingly bright foliage which makes a good clump, and is far more resistant to scorching than many ‘golden’ plants. This comes true from seed, so it is easy to grow a good clump of plants, making an ideal front to a border. There are some rather more

exotic *Tanacetum* as well: *T. niveum* is a bit sparse in leaf, but is smothered in small white daisies for weeks; and *T. balsamita* has silver, lance-shaped, toothed leaves which are good enough to earn it a place in the garden, even without the rather short-lived grey-white flowers.

#### Perfect Daisy Shapes

The ‘Shasta daisies’ (*Leucanthemum x superba*) have some of the largest flowers in the family, and come in some very exciting shapes to boot. ‘Aglai’a’ gives fringed, very double, pure white flowers for weeks and weeks; ‘Snowcap’ is like a much larger, superior version of the wild Moon Daisy. ‘Sonnenschien’ is single, and repeats that useful pale yellow tone.



*Achillea* have the smallest flowers of all, but each one is a tiny perfect daisy shape, like a cut-out on a stencil. The flowers are borne in flat-topped clusters which give them much more impact. There has been a great deal of development, much of it in Germany, which has resulted in softer, more elegant colours and shorter stature than the big brash saucers of ‘Coronation Gold’, once found in every cottage garden. One of the most popular is ‘Terracotta’, - actually a mixture of tan and orange, depending on the light levels; ‘Lachsschönheit’ (‘Salmon Beauty’) is just that. But beware of ‘The Pearl’, which seduces with a label displaying tiny white pompons! This plant runs wildly and indiscriminately, straggles, flops, and is not amenable to being staked - she loves me not!

**Elaine Hunt**