

Cotswold Cottage Gardening

A Wild Experiment

Three years ago, I started a 'wild' border in the garden. I took a strip about five metres wide and 20 metres long; it is east-facing, and backed, like the rest of the garden, by a *C. x leylandii* hedge, which is kept to two metres high. The north end is bordered by a box hedge; the south end is open, although screened by a silver poplar and some other shrubs.

Most of the ground is of the same standard as the rest of the garden, (old orchard), although there is a 'hump' caused by the remnant of two dead elms.

The idea of the border was to use an amalgam of shrubs, perennials, and self-seeding annuals and biennials, interspersed with wild and cultivated grasses. The perennials were mainly less 'cultivated' forms. I had hoped that this border would need less care and weeding than the formal beds. For example, I did not intend to weed it as regularly.



stems and stalks. The native grasses do much better than the introduced ones.

Successful Perennials

The most successful perennials are *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant', *Echinacea* (both pink and white), some seed-grown Michaelmas daisies, which make up in vigour what they may lack in refinement, and a strange *Rudbeckia* relative with no petals but a prominent yellow central boss. *Geranium* 'Brookside', which I turfed out of the formal garden on account of its huge sprawl on flowering, performs in exactly the same way, but is more in keeping than in its previous place. A wild form of centurea, *C. jacea*, copes well with the worst patch of ground, as does the tree-lupin (three stars for this!). The seed-raised *Anchusa* seems to be perennial, but refuses to produce seed itself.

How Did It Go?

So, two growing seasons later, how has it gone? Well, not badly, but not as well as I had hoped. Although some of the stronger perennials have done well, the competition from self-seeding weeds such as nettles and hogweed seems to prevent the foxgloves, nigella, verbascum and the rest from getting a foothold and reproducing (although they manage this quite well in the formal beds!). Even after spraying the more serious weeds in spring, they are beginning to be a hazard again by the autumn.

The grasses do well, and look attractive until August, when they need pulling out or cutting back radically, or the border would just be smothered with dried out

One More Year

Would I repeat this experiment? On the whole, I don't think so. The wild border requires nearly as much maintenance as the established formal borders, (although the maintenance is more concentrated into two or three big pushes) and it gives me less pleasure. The plants I like best in it are the more cultivated varieties, rather than the species or the wildings. The 'formal' beds are packed with plants which grow into each other with just as much vigour and profusion, but because they are more rigorously selected, give a longer season of interest and impact. I shall give it one more year and then threaten it with the mower!

Elaine Hunt