

## Cotswold Cottage Gardening

# Six New Year's Resolutions

Here are my New Year resolutions for a better garden:

Firstly, not to buy any more plants without knowing exactly where they are going to go in the garden, even if it means turfing out some existing occupant which is not up to scratch, or which I just don't like as much as its replacement. Just jamming it in to a spare corner **will not do!**

Secondly, to dig up and throw away plants which are either not performing to expectations, or which are the wrong colour, or size or shape. (There is no shame in having got the wrong plant - or something with a misleading description - but it is foolish to persevere when you could grow something better).

### Fit the Plant to the Site

Thirdly not to grow plants which are unsuitable for our soil and site. Take note of those pathetic yellowing pieris and azaleas eking out their protracted and unattractive deaths in alkaline soil. 'Acid-loving' does not mean that if you give them a couple of shovels of peat they will be 'fine'; it means that even the rain-water in a limestone area like this is poison to them.

Frost-tender plants do not enjoy the Cotswold climate, unless you have a very sheltered spot. All those sorrowful magnolias, covered with brown, frosted blossom... wouldn't it be better to plant something like a prunus, which may be less spectacular in a perfect world, but which has a good chance of withstanding our unpredictable nights?

Very big plants are not suitable for small spaces. *Rosa* 'Kiftgate' can smother a

mature oak tree, as you can see at Kiftgate House; to plant it in an average-size garden is not merely cruel to the plant, but self-defeating, since you will have to prune it so hard it will be unable to flower properly. Get a

climber to fit your space- they come in all sizes from six feet to twenty!

Fourthly, to keep shears and secateurs really sharp. How would you like to be operated on with a blunt scalpel? Jagged cuts let in disease, as well as looking unsightly-and sharp tools make the job twice as easy, as well.

### Limit Your Colour Palette

Fifthly, to have an overall plan for the garden. Nearly every space looks better if there is some sort of a colour scheme.

That means limiting yourself to a palette of complementary colours, or a (few) contrasting ones. Do not buy mixed trays of bedding plants, and then expect that the garden will look harmonious. You wouldn't pick ingredients at random, and then hope to combine them into a gourmet dinner, would you? Plants last a lot longer than a meal.

Colour scheming is even more important for long-term inhabitants such as shrubs. Too many variegated plants, too many feature leaves, too many bright colours (modern roses are particularly assertive), and the eye has nowhere to rest.

And lastly, to remember that one big clump looks twice as nice as two or three single plants. You'll just have to choose the ones you really, really like.

Good luck! and may all your gardens thrive in 2006.

**Elaine Hunt**

