



The garden in... May and June

Kari-Astri Davies is enjoying the first flush of flowers in the garden while planting for more colour.

Left to right: Watering becomes more important as it gets warmer; pastel pink apple blossom; *Begonia Rex* 'Little Brother Montgomery' with its bold silver-marked leaves.



EVERY MAY DAY, I mark the advance of summer by how many candles of flowers are lit on the horse chestnut trees. Some years all the candles are lit, others maybe only flecks of white show on the lowest tiers.

We tend to take this pretty, often monumental, smooth grey-bark tree for granted. I learned recently that it comes from a small area in the Balkans and is found on rocky outcrops, unlike the parkland settings we are used to seeing them in.

“For thee, sweet month; the groves green liveries wear.

If not the first, the fairest of the year;

For thee the Graces lead the dancing hours,

And Nature's ready pencil paints the flowers.”

John Dryden, 'Palamon and Arcite'

Exuberant displays

As well as enjoying early summer's explosion of foliage and flowers, I am currently planting for later summer colour. In the shadier, south-facing raised beds, the theme is sort of exotic. Last year saw an eclectic mix of bedding begonias, a ricinus,

a *Tetrapanax papyrifer*, a red-leaved banana, amaranthus, gingers, nasturtiums and dahlias.

I had anticipated that some of the dahlias left in the ground the previous year would not survive the winter, so I bought more, end-of-season sale bargains. All of the tubers left in the ground came up again, including 'Sarah', a dark-leaved mini with single red flowers fading to rust, and taller-growing 'Karma Choc'.

The new dahlias went in at the end of May; dark red, almost black, semi-cactus 'Rip City' and, similar in colour, water lily type 'Sam Hopkins'. By autumn, lovely as all these dahlias were, there was too much of a lush dark dahlia thing going on. This year, I have bought airy single-flowered 'Magenta Star' from the National Dahlia Collection to lighten the planting. The more stolid 'Rip City' may have to go.

A small selection of tender and hardier fuchsias was also added. They were provided as lovely healthy cuttings by Other Fellow Fuchsias and then grown on by me, not so expertly. Once planted out, 'Lord Roberts' and 'Jester', both 'typical' fuchsias with dark pink top petals and single and frou-frou purple skirts respectively, made a good start. However, they and most of the others succumbed to fuchsia rust in last summer's dull conditions, with leaves and flowers dropped. Although the more tender cultivars seemed less affected, they were shy to flower. I am not going