

Van Hage Garden Article

SENSES SERIES - 'Smell'

The ability to smell is vital to our quality of life and sense of well-being.

It brings us into harmony with nature, warns us of dangers and sharpens our awareness of our surroundings. It can influence our mood and dictate how long we choose to linger in any given place.

With the average human being able to recognise more than 10,000 different aromas, the prospect of creating a 'scented garden' or border filled with a variety of perfumed plants is a supremely exciting and stimulating one.

No two people smell the same perfume in the same way, making it especially difficult when trying to describe the subtle nuances of natural aroma in verbal terms. In other words, a rose may indeed smell sweeter to some people than to others!

When surrounded by plants, our 'nose' governs which flowers we choose to sniff, with favourites becoming ingrained in our 'scent memories' for a lifetime, building a lengthy list of evocative 'essentials' from which to draw when planting our gardens or choosing perfumed cut flowers.

Planting a garden for scent is just as plausible as one for colour, and if you wish your garden to be romantic, fragrance is certainly a key ingredient. However, just like colour, fragrance can be experienced in different intensities according to the time of day, sunlight and temperature, with plants giving off odour in two distinct ways:

- Most familiarly through flowers that exude perfume as soon as they open, such as roses, lilies, honeysuckle and Philadelphus. There is however, no link between flower size or colour and intensity of perfume. Many of the sweetest natural perfumes are released by the smallest, most insignificant blooms like lime blossom, Daphne, or wintersweet (Chimonanthus).
- Perhaps less commonly realised, aromas released through foliage can be none-the-less pungent. Essential oils held within the plant are released through bruising, crushing, trampling or heat. This category of plants includes many of the most well known Mediterranean medicinal or culinary herbs, such as Artemisia, chamomile, lavender, rosemary, sage and thyme.

Our sense of smell is less acute in the morning, with our ability to perceive scent on the increase as the day wears on. Bear this in mind when arranging your planting, with special emphasis paid to groupings around evening seating and entertaining areas for maximum impact.

With a little forethought, it is certainly possible to have fragrance in your garden for twelve months of the year, with sweet-smelling bulbs and bedding for spring, integrated with scented shrubs and trees. Roses and perennials for high summer swirling with aromatic herbs steeped in essential oils, accentuated by the heat. Rich autumn, marked by ripening fruits and late perennials, benefiting from many exotic late tender bloomers, before the first sharp frosts of winter and hardy flowers of sweet smelling shrubs and coniferous trees.

Don't forget, many fragrant plants are evergreens too, providing useful background colour to less

permanent showy planting.

Similar to shop-bought perfumes, scented plants can be classified into different categories according to their predominant aroma:

- Musk - garden azaleas and sweet basil
- Vanilla - Magnolia and Azara
- Lemon - lemon balm (Melissa) and Lippia
- Rose - roses and Dianthus
- Honey / Almond - honey spurge (Euphoria mellifera) & snowdrops (Galanthus).
- Herbal - mint and Monarda
- Sandalwood - conifers and Eucalyptus

For a delicate mix of aromas, create tiers of planting, selecting varieties from the following flower groups, to build a natural balance of fragrance within your own scented garden.

- Bulbs
- Annuals
- Perennials
- Climbers
- Shrubs
- Trees and Conifers

Introduce fragrant plants to beds or pots close to windows, doors and pathways for maximum effect. These will give off scent all season long, allowing you to drink in the fragrance from your garden at all times of the year.

IN THE GARDEN THIS WEEK...

- Cowslips, *Primula veris*, are one of the loveliest British native wildflowers. Steeped in history, they quickly colonise sparse turf, hedge banks or light shade beneath trees, seeding freely where happy and bringing a touch of the old English countryside to our urban back gardens.
- Plant pot-grown hardy perennials for riotous summer colour. Young plants set out now will establish quickly to give high value summer colour at a fraction of the cost of mid-season planting.
- Herb gardens left bare after winter losses can be quickly overhauled and re-planted in time for early summer cropping. Choose well hardened off pot-grown plants and site preferably in a sunny position.
- Sow parsley outdoors onto well-prepared seedbeds, conveniently located for easy kitchen picking.