

# Outside

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## And the winner of the gold medal is...



### GARDENING

By Stuart Jackson

WHILE we are, hopefully, enjoying the fruits of our labour in fruit, flower and veg both in the homes and on the show benches feverish activity is taking place in the garden industry with one aim in mind.

This is the campaign to persuade and guide us in choosing our seeds/plants/corms/tubers for next season.

Our industry is becoming more and more of a minefield to attract us to a particular item. After all we are talking serious money.

Regular readers know that each year I trial quite a few new cultivars. Roughly I grow 80 per cent tried and tested bankers and 20 per cent newcomers, the latter often based on nursery visits.

Two regular channels I pursue is Gardening Which and Fleuroselect. The latter is a growers association covering the whole of Europe, whereby breeders submit their new cultivars to be trialled at many selected sites throughout the whole of Europe.

These tests are extremely demanding, and, it is not uncommon for no gold medals to be awarded some years.

For 2009 however, there are three winners, which will be trialled by yours truly and on sale to the public next spring.

They are Armeria pseudamarmeria ballerina red and ballerina white.

These are first year flowering perennials, 20cm high, 15cm spread, ball-shaped flowers, flowering June to September. Compact, uniform in habit, evergreen through the winter. Suggested for



Perennial favourite: Armeria pseudamarmeria ballerina white



**Gold standard:** Armeria pseudamarmeria ballerina red

planting in beds or borders and also, containers.

The third winner is Prunella grandiflora freelande blue, again another



**Bright blue:** Prunella grandiflora freelande blue

first year flowering perennial. This type first hit the headlines and awarded a gold medal in 2006 as a mixture.

This is a bright blue single

### GARDEN TIPS

■ **Topical Tip No 1:** Late chrysanthemums will benefit from a high potash liquid feed to help ripening buds.

■ **Topical Tip No 2:** Cut dahlias every four/five days to keep the display going.

colour that flowers May to October, and suggested for use as either a pot plant or bedding. Height/spread 15cm, a garden-friendly subject as claimed to attract both butterflies and bees. Again, totally hardy.

I should point out that the first year flowering early sowing (greenhouse), around February is required, or seek out plug plants in April.

Do make a note of these new stars as gold medal winners from Fleuroselect are as scarce as rocking horse manure!

## Demand for allotments is a growing concern

AS AN allotment holder in my formative years the present upsurge in this basic form of gardening is more than pleasing.

Their Association (NSALG) is a most venerable and worthy undertaking which works manfully to promote

gardening plus giving legal "clout" in any dispute. Recently the high demand and shortage of plots available is certainly cause for concern.

Their figures show there are 330,000 plots in the UK with a waiting list of 100,000. They stress that councils

have a legal duty to provide allotments when six or more people apply – food for thought.

Interesting statistics from their survey of vegetables grown show beans in the gold medal spot followed by peas, carrots, potatoes, onion,

beetroot, leek, parsnip, courgette and garlic. The rapid increase in beetroot popularity is attributed to its proven health benefits.

However, the beauty of an allotment is you grow to your choice and palate.

## On the Wild Side

With Ian Rotherham



### What moor could you possibly want?

DANIEL Defoe, travelling in 1725 described the moors above Chatsworth as 'a waste and a howling wilderness'.

I recall talking to a senior manager at the then British Tissues plant at Oughtibridge back in the 1980s, about how they were tipping paper pulp waste across swathes of the Peak National Park, across Bradford Parish, and of course Sheffield.

His response was that he didn't like moorland, it was too bleak and it would be better as improved grassland and planted trees.

Perhaps Defoe was visiting on a bad day and the guy at British Tissues needed to acclimatise and appreciate our wonderful South Pennine landscape. (And yes for all those Bradford Parish Councillors who apparently think I'm a Luddite, it is fantastic and it is beautiful and we must all do our bit responsibly to conserve it for future generations. We'll come back to this later).

I sometimes take groups of first year students to Stranage Edge for their first Peak District visit and ask them to describe what they see and how they feel. Interestingly, about 50-80 per cent of them think that it is fantastic and this is a big reason why they've come to Sheffield Hallam University. Generally around 20-50 per cent of the students, mostly from lowland England or from warmer climates, think it is a god-forsaken spot and they never wish to visit again.

Yes, the moors and the blanket bogs can be bleak, especially in winter, but even then they retain a latent and brooding magnificence. But in late July through to September they burst out into the most wonderful landscape of purple heather.

The fragrance is heavy in the air, especially if you get a still, warm, humid day; the smell of heather honey and old English mead. For just a few weeks the landscape is transformed beyond imagination into a stunning infusion of purples, reds, mauves, and pinks.

Following from the more localised flowering of common cotton-grass which turns the blanket bogs snow-white in June and July, this is surely one of Nature's miracles that we should all be proud of and indeed grateful for.

My research on landscape history at Sheffield Hallam



Heaven scent: Heather

University shows how the moors and heaths used to extend right across the region and down into the lowlands.

From the late 1700s, whole areas were swept away by agricultural 'improvement', and the unique heritage was largely banished to the uplands.

In late medieval times, Barnsley for example, was known as 'Black Barnsley' not because of smoke pollution or even because of coal mining, but because the landscape setting was dark with heather moorland.

You can still find occasional moorland and heath sites down in the lower-lying areas.

Try Wickfield Heath in Sheffield's Shire Brook Valley Nature Reserve for our best local site, or even Houghton Common high above Grimethorpe, east of Barnsley. Further east there are the Thorne and Hatfield Moors, or at least what remains after the horticultural peat extractors and mineral companies have taken their fill.

Stand atop one of the gritstone edges in the Pennines and Peak District the and drink deep of the view and of the overpowering fragrance.

Heather stands out against dark rocks and even darker peat, the 'big sky' reflecting and infusing the landscape with further colour; the breeze lifting the gorgeous scent of heaths and other blossoms, sometimes carrying it several miles to lower-lying land to the east, a reminder perhaps of what once was.

If we need a reason to conserve our wildlife heritage, to take responsibility for our rich and unique environment, then this must be it.

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