In Your Garden

By Robert Blake

Cottage Gardening

David Standing, a highly experienced, former head gardener at Gilbert White's House in Selborne, gave an interesting talk to the Gardeners' Club on Cottage Gardening. He started by outlining the key elements that constitute a cottage garden, the first of which is that it should be picturesque and form a frame for the house when looked at from a distance. It should also present a traditional feel, as if it has been there for a long time, and contain a mixture of plants which create the impression of informality (no straight lines) and 'apparent disorder'. The latter can be aided by allowing flowers to self-seed.

He then went on to describe how to create a cottage garden. Firstly, dig up the lawn! The garden will need deep beds full of plants, which can be a mix of annuals, perennials, herbs and vegetables as desired, and always have a fruit tree. Adding a change of level (e.g. a raised bed) can create more interest, as can growing plants up the wall of the house, such as the vigorous Banksiae 'Lutea' rambling rose. If you have a large area of ground it should be divided into small segments to produce a cottage style. A rustic look can be achieved by using old bricks for paths; Box (Buxus Sempervirens) for edging; mixing stepping stones with gravel and self-seeding plants; introducing stone urns; erecting wooden paling (picket) fences; and introducing topiary if you like a challenge.

Rosa Banksiae Lutea

Hollyhock

David ended his talk by giving his top ten cottage garden plants: Primula, Dianthus (Pinks and carnations), Bellis (Daisy), Viola (Pansy), Alcea (Hollyhock), Sweet Pea 'Painted Lady', Sternbergia (Autumn daffodil), Verbena, Sunflower and the deliciously scented Sweet Rocket (Hesperis Matronalis). However, there are many other traditional plants that can be used according to preference, including old fashioned roses such as the Damask and Gallica groups of hardy shrub roses.

Sweet Pea 'Painted Lady'

Sunflower

Sweet Rocket (Hesperis Matronalis)