

JUNE'S GARDEN

A Visit With the 'Queen'

Since England is known for its Royalty and gardens, Rosemary Verey should be crowned as present-day 'Queen of Gardening.' Verey is an internationally renowned plant-woman and garden designer. She has designed a wide range of gardens for clients and friends including H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. She is one of the most highly regarded garden writers, has written many of her own books, is featured internationally in many other books and magazines, and gives lectures on gardening in England and abroad. The subject of her writings and lectures is based on knowledge acquired during 37 or more years creating her own garden at Barnsley House. Her garden attracts thousands of visitors from all over the world every year. Many re-visit each season, as Verey has designed it to be of interest throughout all seasons.

History of Barnsley House

The three-story William and Mary style Cotswold stone house was built in 1697, in an area known as Barnsley Park. In about 1700, tall stone walls were added to three sides of the garden. In the 1800's, a shelter of belt trees -- sycamore, Turkey Oak, copper beech, chestnut and yew -- were planted that act as an effective windbreak from west winds. Barnsley House had been used as a rectory until 1932 when Rosemary's in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Verey, bought it for their retirement home. In 1951 Rosemary and her husband inherited the property. Some of the gardens were still intact, a few of the trees planted so long ago were still living. The stone walls and belt of trees remained as the essential elements as to the character of the garden. There were three terraces and retaining walls. In 1961 the middle retaining wall collapsed. Rosemary's husband invited a garden designer to visit them for advice as to changing different parts of the garden. Rosemary, wanting to make her own decisions as to changes and additions, became more active. Her son made her a member of the Royal Horticultural Society, her daughter gave her a garden book which Rosemary used to note all the trees and plants that were growing in the garden.

Her husband had been given a gift in 1962 of a stone temple, which was brought to them in a lorry, each stone carefully numbered. David chose the setting, placing it at the end of a pool they had installed in 1954. The pool and the re-structured temple were the same width. Later he placed trees on either side of the pool to anchor it, and with the help of one of the kind gardeners and an ancient tractor trailer, they picked up a load of well-weathered flat stone to lay around the pool. The temple became the most important feature of the garden. Years later on the opposite side of the garden from the temple Rosemary installed another small pool using stone frogs as fountains. These pools are connected by a long grass walk.

More walks evolved slowly, each one happening for different reasons and at separate times. Another connecting walk is lined with trees. At one end are Liden trees which are pruned to create dense compact crowns. These trees are underplanted with seasonal flowers. The trees bloom in July and are highly fragrant. At the end of this paved walk the trees are Laburnum trees (Golden Chain). Wisteria has also been planted to climb the trunks of the Laburnum. Both are pruned to form a canopy over the walk. In the spring when they bloom, their elongated chains of gold and lavender flowers hang thickly to form a dense, fragrant tunnel. In Verey's book, *Making a Garden*, there is a picture of these trees covered with snow after a winter storm. Their branches form many patterns silhouetted against a clear blue sky. Other paths are lined with flowers in all colors. She calls these paths her ribbon paths.

Throughout the years Verey has added a knot garden. Taken from Stephen Blake's *The Complete Gardener's Practice*, she chose the pattern, 'True Lover's Knot.' At each corner of the paired boxwood design are four 'Golden King' holly trees pruned to form double tiers. The heart of the garden is four-foot wide perennial beds on each side of the lawn. She changed an ordinary vegetable patch into a decorative potager. The best translation of word would be that fruits, herbs and flowers are added to the vegetable patch, paying heed in regard to pattern, texture and color combinations. Pathways are designed to divide patterned geometric-shaped beds where flowers and fruit grow together. Examples in Verey's garden are: bright green leaf lettuce underplanted with pale yellow tulips; blue violas are left to re-seed and bloom with dark-leaved lettuce and strawberries. Apple trees planted in the center of each; patterned beds are shaped in round forms, underplanted with rows of seasonal cabbage, leeks, and parsley. Each bed is bordered with lavender or boxwood, some others in herbs such as low growing oregano or thyme. An arbor is covered with nasturtiums and golden hop. Sunflowers planted to the side of the arbor grow through the vines to peer over the top. The heads of the sunflowers lie above the hops and when the seeds are ripe flocks of birds feed on them. Most of the paths are kept clear, but the path under the arbor is narrowed by the growth of nasturtiums, feverfew, bolted dark-leaved lettuce, and calendula.

In 1988, when her son inherited Barnsley House, Rosemary, then living alone, moved to the

Close, a converted stable block that is on the same property. She had a space paved for a courtyard at its entrance. Her son built her a conservatory that was added to her new home. The conservatory is used from February to April to plant hundreds of seeds, both vegetables and flowers, which are used to plant throughout the large garden or sold in plant sales on the days the garden is open to visitors. Cuttings from other plant material are also available for sale.

Rosemary conducted our tour of her garden, and I was taken with the enthusiasm she showed explaining each part of it. Even though she does have help -- her son, and four other gardeners -- she still helps weed and plant and is active in all the decisions made of new plants to add.

When I selected one of her books to buy, titled, *Rosemary Verey's Making a Garden*, I asked if she had any seeds of rose flowered lunaria which I'd seen blooming throughout her garden. She said, "In the fall send me a self-addressed envelope with a letter indicating what seeds you want. I'll be glad to send you some." When I told her I have a lavender and white lunaria growing in my garden, she said, "Let's do an exchange. You send me some of your seeds. I'd like some from your garden." She gave me her address.

In the book I bought from her she wrote, "For June, my good wishes, Rosemary Verey." I'm going to add 'Queen' to her name.

** Parts of this article have been taken from *Rosemary Verey's Making a Garden*.

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