

Easy perennials from seed

Carrie Thomas contributed this piece for the CGS Correspondence group, details below.

I love the spring froth that whitens our country lanes in May. The dark-leaved form 'Ravenswing' I grow in my garden, Touchwood, here in Swansea, South Wales...well, I do intermittently, it's not easy to keep from year to year. Interestingly I use the common name Queen Anne's lace for a totally different plant - wild carrot that grows in profusion around here. It too has a white umbel, but denser and it is later in flower. Strangely, just one tiny floret is deepest crimson, and this gave rise to the name - it looks as if someone has pricked her finger which then bled on her lace. Wild carrot also has an interesting seed-case, as the spent umbel curls up at the edges and meets at the top. I fancy it looks a little like a round bird cage from the outside.

Aileen Wallace (in a recent edition of the Correspondence group newsletter), drew our attention to how long perennials take to display their gifts from seed, compared to annuals and vegetables. Oh how true that is! However, the opposite is also true as I'm frequently reminded by visitors to Touchwood. I've lost track of how many times a visitor has admired an unusual plant, saying that they, too, *must* have that one to grow, only to change their mind when they learn it is 'only' an annual! By comparison, for the same amount of care as an annual, but a little more patience, the perennials from seed will continue to flower each year. Most bulk up and can then be divided to grow elsewhere, or swapped with friends. And - here's the good bit - some are as quick as annuals! There are many perennials that will flower the first year from seed (often rather straggly that first year, it must be said), as well as thereafter. Here's three to start with, perhaps other readers have their own favourites to share?

Viola cornuta (horned violet) and *Geranium pyrenaicum* will both happily flower in about 12 weeks from seed, and both have white forms that also come true. The viola is hardy and clumps up nicely, whereas the geranium is a short lived perennial, but keeps going by self-sowing. My third choice in *Malva moschata*, the musk mallow. This is also available in white (as well as the usual pink) and now also as 'Apple Blossom' a delicate pink, very beautiful. This plant gets bigger and bigger and better and better... until it suddenly dies (flowers itself to death?), but hopefully it will have set some seedlings in its stead. If you grow it and don't like it, well, you can always eat it!

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