

# Going wild

*Shirley Browning*

**T**here comes a time when most gardeners who have a good-sized plot are faced with the dilemma 'shall we move to another property with a smaller garden'?

I have a friend in her late seventies who manages her one-acre garden with only a minimum of help. A ride-on mower is seemingly no problem for anyone who can drive a car.

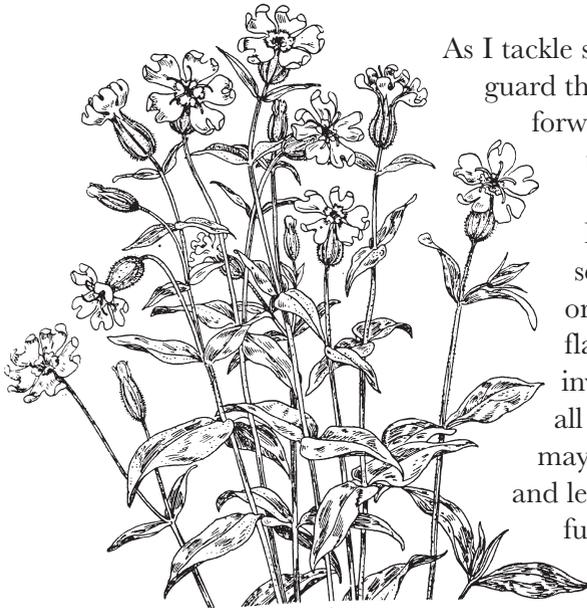
Our garden is only a third of an acre, but my love of flowers is a problem as well as a delight, the problem being the 100ft long mixed cottage-style border running along one boundary, backed by a chain link fence separating the garden from a neighbour's field which is grazed by two horses. A few feet away from the fence is an electric tape keeping the horses away from the boundary. During the summer this 'corridor' fills with long grass and the usual field weeds, until the end of the season when the horses go to stables and our neighbour cuts all the growth down.

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Now that the inevitable approach of old age looms large, the burning question arises regarding garden maintenance. Having read a piece by Mary Keen in the August edition of the RHS magazine, praising the labour-saving practice of allowing self-seeding, this is the idea I intend to incorporate into my plan for a 'natural garden', at least for the problem border referred to. So I shall let the flowers do all the work.

In fact, during this summer the process has already started. With the hot dry months that we have had in Dorset, the seeds have formed early and as the weather has been too hot for much gardening, I have been sheltering indoors with the curtains drawn! Meanwhile, these seeds have been busy doing what they do best - reproducing.

With the fading of the heat wave and a return to a more normal pattern of life, I find that small miracles have occurred in the way of plant associations. Already, seedlings of campion (*Silene armeria*) are appearing along with the prolific *Alchemilla mollis*, borage and my favourite geranium, *G.pyrenaicum* 'Bill Wallis', with its tiny rich purple flowers. In one area, the grass growing in the 'corridor' is particularly tall and by July was a waving mass of pale ochre stems. Fronted by *Verbena bonariensis*, echinops, golden oregano and clumps of borage, the see-through effect, as advocated by Piet Oudolf, was a charming picture, created by nature herself! The view seen through this little area of prairie planting is across farm fields to the locally named 'Hillside Parishes'.



As I tackle some careful tidying, I shall guard the young seedlings and look forward with pleasant anticipation to 2011. I cannot resist buying plants, but in future I will make sure that I buy self-seeders and a few ornamental grasses to camouflage the field varieties which invade the border. I hope that all my plans will not result in mayhem, but we shall stay put and let the garden grow old gracefully, along with its caretakers.

*Shirley Browning gardens  
in Dorset.*