

# Generous people

As I sit and gaze out of my front window at the curved gravel path snaking around the contorted hazel tree, and the positively blowsy borders, I can't help but wonder who influenced my choice in becoming a cottage gardener.



I grew up in a small market town in Lincolnshire on a typical 1950's council estate. We had a rectangular front lawn with a privet hedge around it and borders of flowers around the lawn. My dad was the gardener - mostly a vegetable grower but he grudgingly put in flowers to keep Mum happy. His favoured style was 'municipal' with red salvia, white alyssum and blue lobelia in regimented rows embellished with huge African and French marigolds. We had the most beautiful lilac tree in a rich shade of wine red which bloomed in one corner every May though we were never allowed to cut it for the house as my Mum thought it would bring bad luck!

The back garden was bigger and mostly laid to vegetables and lawn. Here dad indulged his passion for dahlias and I remember all sorts; cactus, pompom, single, all crawling with earwigs which was enough to keep me away from them! He also had a passion for gladioli and to this day I can't see them without getting a lump in my throat. These were my early influences and obviously not where my garden style came from.

However we did have neighbours who gardened in a looser, more natural way and whose gardens I would often peek at over the garden gate. I was enchanted by the pinks, roses, delphiniums, lupins and snapdragons - these are still some of my favourites. Mr Tyler would do his garden after work, often past the light fading. I thought it strange at the time, but now my husband often has to come and fetch me when I get absorbed and it

is almost dark. Mr Tyler favoured roses and showed me how to take cuttings - I still have an Albertine rose that he gave me on my wedding day from his garden.

My best friend Tracey lived two doors away and her Mum had a beautiful garden full of oriental poppies, geums, campanula and peonies. I loved that garden, and whilst Tracey sat in watching TV, I would be outside weeding, whilst her Mum told me about Vita Sackville West and Getrude Jeckyll. At the back of Tracey's house was the most beautiful garden owned by a Mr Ward. I would risk a telling off to go and stare at the white picket fence and gravel pathways and the full blowsy herbaceous borders in that garden. Sometimes Mr Ward would cut me a bunch of flowers and tell me to take them home and learn the names - he would test me next time he saw me.

I didn't garden seriously myself until I moved to this house about 7 years after I got married, arriving with a toddler and a small baby. It has been a labour of love and is still an on going project but I derive such pleasure and joy from it. A young family have moved in next door and their son although only six, is very interested in what I am doing and questions me endlessly. I have always been grateful for the generosity of those gardeners from my childhood who taught me so much. One day I hope that Danny may remember me in the same way.

Tonight as I sit by the pond with my gin and tonic in the last of the evening sun, I shall raise my glass to Mr Tyler, Mr Ward and Tracey's Mum for the wonderful gift they gave me as a small child. For nurturing what they could see was a small spark of interest and giving me such a wonderful gift. if you see a small child who shows an interest, spare them a few moments - you could be igniting that flame that will lead to a lifelong passion and help to keep our distinctive style of gardening alive.

*Viv Bradford gardens in Lincolnshire*

