



Double marsh marigolds

Answers to gardening questions

What plant, to plant where?

By R. W. Sidwell

In amenity gardening you can either choose the plants you would like to grow and then set about creating sites, soils and situations suitable for your own chosen subjects, or you can take the site as it is and choose plants suitable for the conditions that the unaltered site provides.

The first approach is exemplified by those people who buy a cottage on the purest of Cotswold limestone and then come along to seek advice on how to grow rhododendrons. My first reaction is to tell them to go back to Birmingham where suitable soils exist naturally and stop trying to tamper with our wonderful Cotswold soil which will grow so many things so well just as they are. In practice I usually suggest quietly that rhododendrons would be out of keeping with the limestone anyway, even if at great trouble and expense they succeed in growing them.

Most people, nowadays, are seeking to reduce work in the garden and to adopt labour-saving methods and layouts. Perhaps the biggest labour-saver of all is the choice of kinds of plants suitable for the natural sites. However, when we talk of natural sites, I am only too well aware that most new gardens have no natural sites left. By the time builders have dumped subsoil clay over the consolidated remains of the original top-soil, all semblance of a natural site has gone. I will not pursue this line of thought further at this stage except to commiserate with those who have to contend with the aftermath of the modern builder. One day, perhaps, I will return to the theme.

If drainage is impeded, consider carefully before deciding to drain the site. While good drainage is essential for the kitchen garden, it is not so for the ornamental section. There are plenty of plants that will thrive under conditions of poor drainage. One has only to think of *ligularis*, *lythrus*, the many Asiatic *primulas* (i.e. *P. florindae*, *P. japonica*, *P. chungensis*, *P. burmanica*, *P. pulverulenta*), *Iris seberica* and *I. kaempferi*, many *polygonums*, *astilbes* and even some ordinary herbaceous plants, such as *phlox*, to realise what can be done with the wetter parts of the garden. The double marsh marigold is particularly suitable.

If you have a lime-free site, by all means try rhododendrons, *kalmias* or any other *ericaceous* shrub that takes your fancy. You can grow all the *ericas* suitable for outdoor growing in Britain, as well as common heather. Some of the Mediterranean heathers, such as *E. carnea*, *E. mediterranea*, *E. terminalis* and the hybrid *E. darleyensis*, are lime tolerant but they can still be grown on lime deficient soils.

You may like, if you have a warm corner and no free lime, to try those two Chilean gems of the shrub gar-

den, *Desfontainea spinosa* and *Crinodendron hookerianum*. Both are evergreen. The first has holly-like leaves and tubular orange flowers, the latter has flowers like pendant scarlet lanterns. They are plants for the connoisseur.

Camellias tolerate more lime than many people think but they are probably at their best on soils which are just on the acid side of neutral. Light shade is preferable for camellias.

If the garden is heavily shaded with trees, do not rush to have them felled. Why not accept the situation and use plants tolerant of shade? With deciduous trees, spring bulbs, such as daffodils, are often quite successful because they will complete their growth before the canopy gets too dense. Hellebores succeed in fairly dense shade and the autumn flowering cyclamen, *C. neapolitanum*, is at its best under the shade of trees.

For ground cover under very dense shade, we have to resort to periwinkles and ivy. The two periwinkles (*Vinca major* and *V. minor*) are available with both green and variegated leaves and the latter species has forms with both single and double flowers as well as several different colours. Ivies can be had in many types of variegation and with a great variety of size and shape of leaf.

Flowering shrubs have a minimum light requirement and heavy shade may turn them into merely foliage shrubs, but the *skimmias* can stand a good deal of shade, as can all the *sarcococcos*. The butchers broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) is very shade-tolerant but the ordinary form is not very free-fruiting owing to the need for cross-pollination, but there is an hermaphrodite form which sets fruit freely and is quite a striking dwarf shrub when its fruits turn to their deep red during the winter. I know of no shrub that carries its fruits for so long. They frequently last until mid-summer. So far I have discovered no birds eat them, which can be regarded as a disadvantage by those people who grow fruiting shrubs especially to feed birds. It is not very readily available at present, but the position will doubtless improve.

For dry, gravelly, sunny sites, few plants are better than the rock roses, *helianthemum* and *cistus*. The common rock rose grows wild on the Cotswolds and its numerous colour variants are popular garden plants growing under one foot high. The species of *cistus* are mostly larger. *Cistus corbariensis* will reach six feet and has white flowers opening from red-tinted buds. *C. cuprius* is about the same height and has larger flowers with a purple blotch. Some of the other *cistus* species are rather tender and are unsuitable for planting on cold sites, but are admirable for warm corners.