

# Beds, borders and gardens

By R. W. Sidwell

There is a commonly accepted rule that plants in English gardens are grown in beds or borders. Beds are usually cut in a lawn and they are planted either with bedding plants or with roses. Shrubs and herbaceous plants are grown in borders. Fruit and vegetables are not grown in beds or borders.

A bed differs from a border in that it is surrounded by an area on which people can walk. Borders usually face one way. That is to say that a person viewing it can walk along the front of the border. The back of the border may be a hedge, wall, woodland or a gasworks. The double border is a variant and is in some ways intermediate between the bed and the border. This faces two ways and is really an elongated bed.

With beds and borders set in lawns, the greatest item of labour is in preventing encroachment of grass into the cultivated areas. Narrow strips of grass are particularly troublesome and the practice, common in Victorian gardens, of having narrow grass strips separating borders from paths is a feature that cannot be justified either by aesthetic or management grounds. Inevitably some of the plants near the front of the border will tumble over the lawn and create problems in mowing. One has the choice of damaging the overhanging plant or leaving the grass uncut at that point. How much more satisfactory if plants are allowed to tumble directly over a gravel or paved path, breaking the hard line of the path edge and creating no problems at all.

As an example of the problems created by beds in lawns we need to look no further than the traffic island at the roundabout at the bottom of the Broadway Road in Evesham. For

years the attempt to maintain cultivated beds in mown grass has been disastrous. If the whole area had been cultivated the labour requirement would be substantially less. Otherwise, rough mow the whole lot which, at least, removes the need for skilled labour.

Parks departments have a special liking for beds in lawns and some superb examples of how to do this sort of thing properly can be seen in many of our cities and seaside resorts. Where the aim is to produce the greatest possible mass of bloom for a given period there is nothing wrong with growing bedding plants in well-cultivated beds surrounded by closely mown and neatly-edged lawns, provided the labour is available and there is money to pay for it, but few garden features look worse than attempting to do this with inadequate skill and insufficient time.

The tradition of confining herbaceous plants to borders was established long ago. When Alan Bloom, a modern pioneer of herbaceous plants, pointed out that herbaceous plants could be grown in beds, people thought "how funny". When Mr Bloom emphasised that he was referring to "island beds" there were many raised eyebrows.

"Island beds for herbaceous plants? Whatever next?" I have never been clear in my mind about the difference between a bed and island bed.

For my part I dislike beds and borders. I like plants to be grown in areas of ground interspersed with paths leading from somewhere to . . . somewhere. The purely herbaceous border is one of the duller parts of the garden in winter. I dis-

like herbaceous borders, though I like herbaceous plants. Nature mixes her trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants up and produces some semblance of a balanced plant community although in fact, it is constantly changing in detail. I like to copy nature.

The ideal starting point would be an open woodland. Here we have a few trees, not sufficient to cause heavy shade except in small areas more or less open areas, and especially near the margins, still more open sites with access to full sun.

In such a situation one can use shrubs, herbaceous and ground-cover plants much as they would occur naturally.

One cannot expect the front garden of a modern semi to start off as a natural woodland, but even with areas as small as this the same principle can apply. Instead of a rectangular lawn with an 18-inch border all round it and a bed in the middle, we can have the whole area cultivated. There would be choice shrubs of varying height and a few carefully selected herbaceous and ground cover plants. With climbers on the boundary fences the picture is complete.

No weekly lawn mowing and edging when established, little weeding — and something of interest throughout the year.

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