



How a Garden of Eden was planted in Paris

Go up a steep, narrow rough road from Ashton-under-Hill towards the top of Bredon Hill and you arrive in Paris. And once you are there it will not take a minute to find one of the most interesting gardens in the Four Shires.

Paris, England, is the home of Mr. Ronald Sidwell, a botanical and horticultural expert. He lives in a modernised Cotswold stone house named Bredon Springs and his land is surrounded by peaceful meadows on one side and, on the other, a glorious view over the countryside stretching to the foot of the Cotswolds.

But while the surrounding land has a certain monotony, the one and a half acres of garden he tends have all the wonderment you would expect of the Garden of Eden.

It was at the beginning of the second World War that Mr. Sidwell moved to Evesham. He took up a position as Ministry of Agriculture District Horticultural Officer, the first such officer in the town.

A COLLECTION

"I am a professional horticulturist and have been one for 45 years," he told the *Evesham Journal*. "I started as a garden boy on a big private estate in Warwickshire owned by the grandson of Lord Iliffe."

Mr. Sidwell, now 60, started doing advisory work later on and was once vice-principal of the Pershore College of Horticulture.

"All my qualifications are in horticulture, but my inclinations are botanical," he said.

Together with his wife Marjorie, he began to surround his house—three old cottages joined into one—with a fantastic collection of beautiful, colourful and plain interesting plants.

"We have been building up this plant collection since the beginning and we have been extending it for the last five years. This was the first place we bought. We lived in rented accommodation for some years before."

"When we found this place was for sale we bought it. It is very well documented and goes back to the 18th century."

"We have had very little done to the house. We had some water and sanitation put in, but it was just modernisation. All the original timbers and stone are still there."

"I knew the area pretty well and chose this place because of the soils here."

"Being on the spring line we have a bog as well as dry sites. No matter how dry the weather we have permanent bog."

MEANDERS

The garden itself is divided into several areas, each with its own character. There are no fences or boundaries. Except the clever planting of shrubs or the tactical leaving of an old fruit tree to separate these areas, and they each merge to form a most pleasant walk.

The lawn meanders around the bog area where all sorts of colourful and exotic plants grow in unplanned harmony against a backdrop of willow trees.

Down the slope the lawn leads to a garden seat set among the expensive scent of common and uncommon shrubs and where you can look down over the villages, if the rows of colourful flowers do not grab your attention first.

Walk towards the north and there is a shaded stroll among the fruit trees, walk upwards and west and there are the rose gardens, greenhouse and potted plants.

Back towards the house, each turn provides a different blend of colours and a different side of Mother Nature's character.

"Some people keep budgerigars, some collect stamps, some play bingo. I collect plants."

"I am a professional and I am interested in plants, not because they are showy."

"I grow them because I am interested in some feature of them. I like to see if they will grow as well here as in the Himalayas."

"To prepare a site, you eliminate the weeds more or less and then you take the site as it is naturally. You then plant a range of plants to see what happens. You choose the things you think will do best. You get a few disappointments, while some plants you were doubtful about sometimes succeed."

"I like arrangements to have character. This garden is partly aesthetic, partly scientific, but the arts side is more important for me."

"I do quite a lot of paintings and I have given lectures to landscape architectural students on the nature of plants."

"I have studied the use of trees, not merely to hide ugly buildings in the cities but to provide a pleasant accompaniment to modern buildings."

To sum up his garden, Mr.

Sidwell did not think it was a hobby as much as an interesting and pleasureable part of his working life.

"This is a wild garden to give me a minimum of work. I like to see how little work we can do on it."

"To trim the lawns and things here would kill the place dead. I would rather cover it up with concrete than do that. It would lose its character completely."

"This is an attempt to guide nature rather than fight against it."

"I do not use any highly toxic sprays here, and I only use the less severe ones when I have to. We have a large bird population here and a tremendous amount of butterflies."

"We grow a lot of plants that butterflies like because we like to see them. We do little spraying because we don't want to upset them."

"I make a little money from the garden, but it does little more than offset the cost of it. My work takes me all over England and Wales."

"I only do work I like doing. I am in the position that I am self-employed and can pick and choose to a certain extent."

Mr. Sidwell's travels have been of great help in enabling him to pick up unusual plants. He has a sea aster which had never been known to grow away from its native salt marshes before. It grows in the boggy part of the garden in spite of the lack of salt.

"I believe I have 2,000 varieties of plants here," he said. "I have not made a catalogue for a long time. We lose some from time to time. Of this total we have 100 different varieties of roses."

UNCOMMON

"We have some uncommon English plants as well as some from South and North America, Mexico, Canada, China and the Himalayas."

"Many you can go out and buy because they are common. Some are uncommon because nobody wants to know about them."

Two interesting plants in bloom this month were a Japanese Bog Iris and a rare English water buttercup.

Also, growing on the front of the house, was a large vine straining to hold up vast bunches of green grapes. Without glass or special attention it was growing naturally.

Mrs. Sidwell makes homemade wine. The grapes are an obvious subject, but because of the easy recipe, she finds that rose petal is a good and readily available ingredient.

At present, the pride of Mr. Sidwell's garden is a *Clerodendron Fargesii*. A large bush with pale yellow flowers it gives off the most glorious scent. It grows next to the hedge and could not fail to give a passer by an indication of Mr. Sidwell's business.

Near to the house is what Mr. Sidwell claims, without too much confidence, the largest mock orange bush in the country. It is 25ft. across and about 20ft. high.

"We did not plant it. It was already here on the site of an old outdoor earth closet. Perhaps that is the secret of its success," he said.

WHAT'S A WEED?

Many of the plants he grows, though, would normally be classified as weeds. An example is the horsetail growing next to the willows.

"A weed is a plant out of place," Mr. Sidwell maintains. "It is up to me to decide whether it is out of place or not. A plant is not a weed until it becomes a nuisance."

To show what he means he pointed to various plants collected from their wild environment on the coast of Wales. They certainly did not look out of place but tended to add character to the garden.

Finally, Mr. Sidwell pointed to a four-leaf clover. Known as wild Dutch clover it is apparently not so rare. He even has them growing in pots. If you need a little luck, you now know where to go.