

## Creating a “Glorious Jumble”

By Zelpha Boyd, Gallatin Empire Garden Club Member

“The cottage garden is a profusion of flowering plants and produce, all growing together in a glorious jumble.” This quote from the book, Creating a Cottage Garden in North America by Stephen Westcott-Gratton, spells out exactly what my garden is at the present moment—a least the jumble part.

When I moved into this little house on North Ida in Bozeman with its little gardening space, I knew it would be the right place for me to make an English Garden. I had visited England years ago, Ireland and Scotland more recently, and was impressed with the tiny gardens occupying the small spaces between houses and sidewalks. These people really know how to make every inch count, and they fill those inches with flowering plants and vegetables. No lawn to mow—actually no space for grass, or a lawn mower!

Downsizing into this much smaller space and knowing that if I were to continue gardening, it would have to be made much easier—The English Cottage Garden seems the way to go. Keep it simple, cut down on the maintenance and most of all, simply spend time enjoying the bounty of flowers and vegetables.

Because my daughter—the former gardener here—hailed in a lot of compost, the soil is in excellent shape. I’ve planted delphinium, phlox, and iris, several varieties of dianthus, poppies and calendula—all in mass confusion. These supplement the existing plants of iris, daylilies, feverfew, garlic, peonies and rhubarb. As in the typical Cottage Garden, I’ve also planted edibles—an asparagus bed, strawberries, carrots, beets, spinach, and zucchini, all in miniature proportions. The tomatoes are in the green house.

In the front yard, I did the lasagna thing to get rid of the grass. The space is so small that mowing it would create a lot more work than it’s worth. Lasagna Gardening is the process of starting a new garden without the work of digging up weeds and sod. I laid down several layers of newspaper on the existing grass, and covered that with soil, weeds, grass clippings, compost, manure and more soil. This effectively smothered out the lawn while creating a new growing space. The first season, last year, I scattered wild flower seed knowing their roots would reach down through the lasagna layers and help

break down the organic matter. This year some of the flowers re-seeded and I have wild flowers in among newly planted perennials.

In creating a cottage garden of this sort I need to remind myself that it does become a “glorious jumble” of plant material. Nothing neat and trim about it! Allowing each variety to do its own thing sometimes becomes disconcerting as some plants want to spread into their neighbor’s territory. I’ve found that tomato cages are invaluable in holding taller flowers—delphinium, phlox, gaillardia, peonies and oriental poppies—from being blown over by the wind.

To finish out this type of garden, there needs to be walkways, garden ornaments and water features. The paths, I’ve accomplished with the use of wood chips—free from a tree trimmer working on our street. A bird bath has become the water feature; numerous ornaments and trellises are completing the picture. Porches, at both the front and back doors, a wooden bench along the back fence, and a picnic table in the front, allow me the opportunity to sit and enjoy the beauty of my “glorious jumble”.

A small space with flowers crowding each other leaves little room for weeds and no need to cultivate—making my downsizing complete. A thick mulch keeps watering chores to a minimum. Yes, I’m finally creating my very own English Cottage Garden—in Montana!