

Preface:

The below article by Bob Woolley appeared in the **17th May 1986** edition of **Amateur Gardening**, and is kindly reproduced by their kind permission and that of editor Jenny Bagshaw who was kind enough to trace the article and forward it to me for use herein.

I wish to record and send my grateful thanks and also those of the British National Carnation Society to Amateur Gardening for allowing us to use this feature. It is our dearest wish that Tom's article will stimulate and attract new border carnation growers to our hobby. Tom remains one of the finest border carnation growers of our time and his achievements in both raising new varieties and growing them to a wonderful standard will be talked about by growers in the North East for a life time to come

NB. Sadly Tom died during 2012 and I publish this article as a tribute to his memory and in the hope it may stimulate more members to grow these wonderful flowers.

Editor

Border Carnations, the Expert Way

By Tom Peverley (Deceased)

Article written by Bob Woolley

The border carnation has fallen on hard times. Although still a well-loved flower and the centre of attraction at specialist flower shows, it is no longer a common feature in gardens. Instead, it has become a connoisseur's flower grown with enthusiasm by devotees who value the symmetrical perfection of blooms of this historical flower of the gods.

Maybe gardeners have come to believe that the border carnation is difficult to grow and needs pampering under glass because this is the procedure followed by exhibitors nowadays. In truth, the reason they are grown in unheated, well-ventilated greenhouses is purely for ease and convenience. Those without a greenhouse take heart. Some of the finest show-winning blooms I ever saw were grown in the open garden and their only protection from adverse weather was provided by individual shades in the same way they are used by rose exhibitors.

The border carnation is completely hardy outside given good drainage and a soil sweetened as necessary with garden lime. Propagation by cuttings and by layering non-flowering shoots during summer is easy. It is relatively free from pests and diseases. So anyone can grow border carnations satisfactorily, but this is not sufficient for enthusiasts. The charm and the beauty of the flowers inspires them to strive for perfection.

To see how this is attained I visited 62-year old retired pitman Tom Peverley on his allotment at Houghton-le-Spring in north-east England. Tom has been growing border

carnations as a hobby for over 40 years and is still winning top honours at the North of England Rose, Carnation and Sweet Pea Society Show in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Six hundred and fifty plants, grown one to a 6 or 7in. pot or two to an 8in. pot, filled his two self-made wooden framed 20ft. by 12ft. and 20ft. by 9ft. greenhouses. Tom told me

‘I have never grown for gain, and don’t sell plants but they do give me untold pleasure year after year at little cost’

Tom pots up his propagated, young, rooted plants individually in 3 ½ in. or 4in. pots in late summer-early autumn. The compost, mixed a week before being used, comprises one bucket each of loam (rotted turfs are ideal), peat and sharp sand, plus 4oz. John Innes Base Fertiliser or Vitax Q4 and 4oz. of garden lime.

In spring the plants are moved into their large, final pots. The compost used is in the same proportions of loam, peat and sharp sand but with the addition of half a bucket of very well rotted farm manure, 8oz. John Innes Base Fertiliser or Vitax Q4, 8oz. bonemeal and 8oz. of garden lime.

When the plants are growing strongly, a teaspoonful of blood, fish and bonemeal fertiliser and a teaspoonful of sulphate of potash are very lightly stirred into the top of the pots with an old dinner fork and watered in.

As the flower buds start to form the plants are given a liquid feed of Maxicrop and one final feed of Phostrogen as soon as petals emerge.

To keep the plants pest-free (greenfly is the most common one) Tom grows a few African marigolds in the greenhouse and sprays once a month during the growing season with a systemic insecticide; he uses a house fly spray to kill blue bottles which mark and pollinate open blooms causing them to fade prematurely. Keep the compost moist during the growing season.

I asked Tom to recommend some of his favourite and most reliable varieties. His choice included;

Andrew Morton: lemon ground marked dark purple

Belle of Bookham; old rose

Dusky Maid; white ground marked purple

John Wood; lemon and magenta

Leslie Rennison; orchid purple and rose

Peter Wood; deep pink flaked red

Robert Smith; white flecked pink and

Something Special; white ground heavily marked and edged mauve

There are still many varieties in catalogues which have old-fashioned clove-scented blooms. *Leslie Rennison* and *Something Special* have this quality as do three of my own favourites, *Lavender Clove*, *Merlin Clove* white striped purple and *Perfect Clove*

which is deep crimson.

Join Tom Peverley in his satisfying and stimulating hobby by planting some border carnations in the garden or in pots. A specialist supplier is Haywards Carnations, The Chase Gardens, Purbrook, Portsmouth. PO7 5PL

(Editors note: Haywards Carnations ceased trading in 2011 due to retirement)