

## Floral Alderney

Alderney's mild climate encourages an abundance of wild flowers – over 1,000 species of which more than 200 are winter flowering. Many gardens feature Mediterranean and Southern Hemisphere plants. The cliff paths are surrounded by superb wild displays. Wild orchids colonise the commons, whilst the intriguingly named Bastard Toadflax plant makes its home close to the sea along the east coast.

Alderney possesses an extremely rich natural flora. In relation to its total area of just under 2,000 acres, there are more species recorded than almost anywhere else in the British Isles, with some 1034 species having been recorded at various times since the earliest records published in 1839. Of these about 850-900 are currently to be found in the wild.

Of these about 20 are included in the British Red Data Book as Endangered Species and a further 30 or so are listed as Scarce or Protected species. Two plants are sufficiently unique to be named after the island in their Common names. Alderney Sea-lavender *Limonium normanicum*, (which is also found in a single area in Jersey and along the coast of the Cotentin Peninsula) and the Alderney Crane's-bill *Geranium submolle*.

### The History

When the islanders first returned in late 1945 and 1946, after the war ended, Alderney was run for about 2 years as a communal farm with everyone working together to grow food at a standard wage of £3 a week for men and 1/- an hour (5p) for women.

In 1947, Francis Impey established the first market garden, 'Island Gardens Ltd', at first at Fort Corblets and then the La Vallee Gardens, in the Pré de l'Eglise. Crops of asparagus, flowers, melons, strawberries and radishes were grown here, some of it under cloches. At about the same time, once the Blayes had been returned to

their owners in 1948, a thriving flower-growing industry was set up and large quantities of early potatoes were exported, necessitating the bringing of workers from Norfolk in England and from Guernsey, to harvest the crops. 5 million daffodils were exported from the island in 1965 and iris and gladioli were also cultivated for the flower trade.

Part of the reason for the subsequent decline in this trade was the reduction in frequency of shipping services and the difficulty of obtaining sufficient pickers at the right time. Alderney has rarely had any unemployment problems since the war and other work had become better paid and more acceptable to the local population. The 1952 States' Guide to Alderney also refers to the 'Cinderella Nursery'.

By the mid 1960s, the Market Garden project was virtually abandoned as an exporting enterprise. Since then, with rapidly increasing numbers of settlers, all of the flower cultivation has been confined to gardens and there are many well laid out and maintained properties for the visitor to admire which enhance the appearance of both town and country. A number of "alien" species from warmer climes are included amongst these, now naturalised in our generally frost free environment and many have spread or been accidentally introduced into the wild as well. The more weedy ones, such as Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana* and Fennel *Foeniculum vulgare*, usually only being found in the wild.

Among the more obvious are the many plantings of Monterey Pine *Pinus radiata*, which thrives but rarely seems to reproduce itself. The Evergreen Spindle-tree *Euonymus japonicus*, is widely planted as a wind resistant hedging and seeds itself occasionally. This has cluster of inconspicuous greenish flowers from April-June and, in a good year sets bunches of red 4 seeded fruits. Another good evergreen windshield, widely planted is *Elaeagnus*, of which there are several varieties. Hundreds



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of small white bell-shaped flowers appear in autumn and are followed through the winter by silver, changing to red, oval fruits with a hard stone under the thin fleshy coat. The birds love this and the dropped seeds often grow into new plants. Prominent amongst the more colourful aliens are; Giant Echium *Echium pininana*, originating from the Canary Islands, a close relative of the native Viper's Buglos producing huge spikes of blue/pink flowers up to 15 feet tall; the Madeiran Geranium *Geranium maderense*, a native of Madeira, with heads up to 3 feet across of large purple/red flowers, from March to July which seeds itself rampantly; Hottentot Fig *Carpobrotus edulis*, with both pink and yellow colour forms, a native of South Africa, can be seen in gardens and on cliffs and waste land all over the island. There are two similar smaller species found less frequently, the Sea Fig and Sally-my-Handsome, with many colourful areas of Rosy Dew-plant *Lampranthus* species and the tiny flowers of dark red Heart-leaf Ice-plant *Aptenia cordifolia*, occasionally forming large hanging patches on walls. These five are all members of the mesembryanthemum family.

In May and June especially, the whole island is a tapestry of colour, the yellow of Gorse all over the island, yellow Prostrate Broom, white Ox-eye Daisies and Sea Campion and pink Thrift on the SW cliffs greet both resident and

visitor as the planes arrive. The commons are covered with the yellow of Buttercups, the white of the common Daisy and in the short sandy turf in many places the pink Pyramidal Orchids are plentiful towards the end of June and in July. Many other colourful plants are to be found in the wild all round Alderney.

The diligent botanist will also find many minute plants flowering amongst the rabbit-cropped turf, each beautiful in its own right when viewed with a hand lens, but not otherwise contributing vastly to the overall impression of our beautiful island.

**Floral Alderney by Alderney Botanist Brian Bonnard**

