

Tale from the Garden!

'No Mow May' has certainly helped the beautiful wildflowers of Spring and Summer take centre stage in our local hedgerows & lawns.

Buttercups and daisies are two of my favourite plants. They were the first wildflowers that I learned to recognize as a child. My friends and I would often pick the flowers and press them between sheets of newspaper to dry them. Sometimes we would hold a shiny buttercup under someone else's chin, looking for the golden reflection that indicated that they liked butter. We would join the daisies together to make daisy chains and wear them around various parts of our body as jewellery. Wild flowers such as daisies & buttercups may be considered weeds but they have a special place in childhood.

I love looking at wildflowers on my walks & I'm always happy when I see the first buttercups & daisies emerge. The buttercups have a beautiful golden glow. The daisies look very cheerful with their yellow centres and white petals. Buttercups and daisies have been an important part of my summer for many years. The rich, lustrous glow of buttercup petals and the cheery, vibrant appearance of the contrasting yellow centres and white rays of daisies add a great deal of pleasure to a spring or summer walk. The flowers are a beautiful sight and a lovely link to days gone by.



If we are looking for a symbol to reflect newfound positivity and hope in trying times, what better than a staunchly resilient, yet delicately pretty flower that is so familiar to us all: the common lawn daisy (*Bellis perennis*).

Trampled underfoot, hardly a second glance, I wonder how many of us have really looked at one since we sat on the school playing field as small children to make daisy chains. I myself have certainly not appreciated until now their remarkable hardiness, their ecological role and their cultural significance.

Flowering year-round, their tiny cheery blooms can be found within a stone's throw of you in any urbanised area, at Christmas or in midsummer, and you can't say that about many plants! Opportunistic and thrifty, the lawn daisy is well-adapted to heavy vegetation management and difficult soil where most plants throw up their metaphorical white flag and surrender to a regime of mown grass.

Its commonness and familiarity explains why this daisy, whose name derives from the Latin for 'pretty and everlasting', is seen as the unofficial representative of all 23,000 species of daisy in the world. Daisy species make up roughly one in ten flowering plants on the planet and grow everywhere except Antarctica. Their umbrella family, Asteraceae, is characterised by the unique make-up of the flower head, which appears to be one single flower but it is actually hundreds of tiny ones. In the case of our common daisy, these consist of yellowy orange 'disc florets' bunched together and surrounded by white 'ray florets'.

A staple of lawns and amenity grasslands, the flowers offer a welcome source of nectar and pollen for small solitary bees, flies and beetles, and this importance is heightened when other flowers are absent. While the daisy doesn't have a special relationship with one particular species of insect, it can help improve the overall biodiversity of a grassland or garden.

As well as playing an ecological role, it has had its uses to humans in recent and ancient history too. People are thought to have first cultivated daisies during early gardening activity in the early Bronze Age, and it was probably even further back than this when we realised they had medicinal properties and edible leaves.

The juice of the common daisy is full of astringent compounds. The Romans harnessed this herbal medicine by ordering that sackfuls' of daisies be collected during war time and applied to soldiers' spear and sword wounds to help close the tissue and stem blood loss. Henry VIII also famously ate daisies to cure stomach ulcers.

Most famously, however, the daisy has a long-standing place in European culture, particularly that of childhood because it is a symbol of innocence and purity. Petal picking 'he loves me, he loves me not' games are played to this day; daisy chains were once an essential part of dressing up for the village May Day; children still have daisy chain competitions at school. Plus, how many cows have been named Daisy?

Many of us will be waging war on daisies in the lawn with weed killer, or simply overlooking them as we tend our bigger, more exuberant blooms, so I hope this account of the dainty yet robustly spirited little daisy is enough to make you look at one twice!

And talking of childhood, do you remember singing this hymn – 'Daisies are our silver'?

It was written by Jan Struther (1901-53). Jan Struther was the pen name of Joyce Anstruther, an English writer remembered for her character 'Mrs Miniver' & her hymns for children, including 'Lord of all hopefulness', 'When a Knight won his Spurs' & 'Daisies are our Silver'. This charming children's hymn was written for the tune GLENFINLAS, to which the words are beautifully suited. It might be thought of as a typical 'Songs of Praise' hymn, undogmatic and full of nature imagery. Its title, 'Treasure', is a reminder that in the world of nature we have possessions more valuable than anything we can store in a warehouse!

Daisies are our silver; Buttercups our gold;
This is all the treasure, We can have or hold.

Raindrops are our diamonds, And the morning dew;
While for shining sapphires, We've the speedwell blue.

These shall be our emeralds, Leaves so new and green;
Roses make the reddest Rubies ever seen.

God, who gave these treasures To your children small,
Teach us how to love them And grow like them all.

Make us bright as silver: Make us good as gold;
Warm as summer roses Let our hearts unfold.

Gay as leaves in April, Clear as drops of dew
God, who made the speedwell, Keep us true to you.

MAKE THIS YOUR PRAYER THIS WEEK

We might think we take the time to stop and smell the roses, but how often do we silently watch a patch of grass or earth, a portion of bark on a tree, the fluttering of petals on a flower, for more than a few seconds?

Often the magic unfolds only after patient, silent, and focused watching. That is when you will find nature's hidden treasures. There are so many worlds within worlds around us and when we take the time to see them our own world opens into endless possibilities of creativity, peace, and harmony.