

Tale from the Garden

Dierama – a delightful dangler!

Have you been watching all the planting that's been going on along the banks of the River Leven in Stokesley? All part of the environmental project to bring wildlife back to the river. It's made me think of plants which are attractive near water & none can be more well-named than the Angel's Fishing Rod. The Dierama has long, arching 'fishing rods' with clusters of small mauve or purplish bell-shaped flowers dangling like floral bait during July & August. Although it's often grown by a pond (where it casts wonderful reflections) it's not a water plant. In fact, it hates wet feet & needs well drained soil in full sun. It's ideal for a baking-hot spot where nothing much else thrives & can be good for a patio tub. Being naturally architectural, it makes a great focal point for the end of a path & is a perfect perennial for a sunny border.

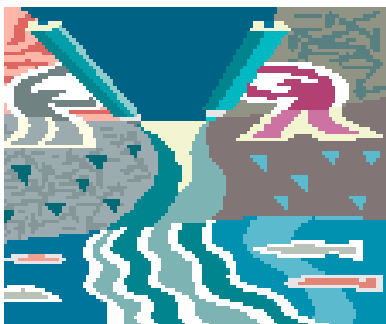


Dainty, pink, bell-shaped blooms dance like lures along delicate arching stems, evocative of a fishing rod dangling serenely by a pool. The evergreen clumps of fine strap-leaf foliage anchor the impossibly fine flower stems. Simply stunning in pots, by a pond or as a garden feature where even the gentlest breeze will provide a rhythmic effect of swaying flower wands, hence the alternative common name 'Fairy's Wandflower'.

The genus 'Dierama' is endemic to Africa and contains some 45 species distributed from the southern Cape in South Africa to the highlands of Ethiopia. Its greatest diversity is found in KwaZulu-Natal, where about 26 species occur. 'Dierama pendulum' is one of the most well-known and desirable members and has a somewhat limited distribution extending from Knysna in the southern Cape, to the Zuurberg and Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. It frequents grassy slopes and flats in full sun in stony or marshy ground, and its flowering period extends from early spring to early summer. The Afrikaan popular name is 'grasklokkies'.

Derivation of name and historical aspects

The genus name 'Dierama' is derived from an ancient Greek word meaning a funnel, referring to the shape of the flower, while the specific nickname 'pendulum' is derived from Latin and refers to the pendulous branches of the inflorescence (the complete flower head of the plant including the stems, stalks, bracts, and flowers). 'Dierama pendulum' was the first member of the genus to be discovered in the wild, and was gathered for the first time near the Kromme River in the Eastern Cape in the early 1770s by the great Swedish botanist, Thunberg.



Stokesley River Leven Group

The Aim of the Group is to conserve a river environment that is well maintained and abundant in quality features. I've seen volunteers in their wellies, wading through the water, shovelling stones & pebbles into banks where the water can ripple through to create habitats for wildlife.

The Tees Rivers Trust has been established to protect, conserve, rehabilitate and improve the River Tees & its catchment area, its feeder streams, water courses, estuary and adjacent coastal areas. It has been working alongside the Stokesley River Leven Group & introducing flora & fauna on the Leven through Stokesley. A combination of planted coir rolls to formalise the existing bank side and a set of flow deflectors are all part of the habitat improvement works.



And is it working? Well I've definitely seen shoals of minnows, forever alert & darting quickly in response to food or danger. Minnows are one of the most abundant British fish, inhabiting clean, well oxygenated water and are mainly found in streams and rivers, occasionally being found in clean lakes and ponds. Minnow eat tiny crustaceans, freshwater shrimps, insect larvae and algae and aquatic plants. They spawn several times between April and June, making short migrations upstream to shallow, gravelly beds. They form an important part of the food chain & predators of the minnow include the brown trout and various birds including the delightful Kingfisher. If 'tiddlers' can return to the waters of Stokesley, then perhaps this heralds the start of a flourishing habitat.

Have you ever been to the Holy Land & visited the Dead Sea? As a tourist, you reach the sea by driving over verdant hills and then descending to the edge of this unique body of water, which lies 1,296 feet *below* sea level. Because the Dead Sea has no outlet, mineral rich water that flows in cannot flow out. The soaring hot and dry conditions of this region mean that large quantities of water are evaporated. This leads to the salt and other minerals becoming more and more concentrated. In fact, it's estimated that in the whole of the Dead Sea there is about 37 billion tonnes of salt. Thus, the Dead Sea is about seven to ten times saltier than the ocean.

Tourists are encouraged to sit in the Dead Sea. That's right, to "sit" in the Dead Sea. Because the water is so dense with minerals, you can literally sit in the water as if in a beach chair, with your head and shoulders completely above the water. It feels a bit like sitting in a kind of liquid Jello!

Yet the Dead Sea is far from sweet. It's called "dead" because the high salinity prevents anything from living in the Sea. No fishing there then! The only exception is when there is a great quantity of rain in the area. For a brief time, algae can live in the Dead Sea. But this occurrence is quite rare.

In his revelation to Ezekiel, the Lord uses the unique character of the Dead Sea in order to make a point about the Temple, which lay about 15 miles away from and 3,800 feet higher than the Sea. He describes a miraculous river that flows from the Temple down to the Dead Sea: 'He said to me, "This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah [the Jordan Valley], where it enters the Sea [the Dead Sea]. When it empties into the sea, the water there becomes fresh.'" Ezekiel 47 v8

Thus, "Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish ... Fishermen will stand along the shore." Life will thrive in the Dead Sea because of the transformative power of the water from the Temple.

This vision in Ezekiel 47 demonstrates what happens in us when the water of the Holy Spirit flows into our hearts. It touches and transforms every part of us, so that we might be more fully alive and life-giving to others. The dead parts of us are invigorated by God's Spirit, so that we might live more abundantly now, in anticipation of the life that is yet to come.

PRAYER: Gracious God, thank you for this stirring picture of the river in Ezekiel 47. Thank you for being a God who gives life, not just in creation, but in re-creation as well.

O Lord, let your living water flow into our lives. Transform us so that we might live more fully and share your life with others. *Amen.*

So, remember the beautiful reflection cast by the Angel's Fishing Rod?

'As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man.' Proverbs 27:19