**Garden News**

**A Flower for September – Asters & Other “Daisies”**

For September, thoughts turned to the Michaelmas Daisy; September 29th being Michaelmas Day which, in years gone by, was one of the quarter days when accounts, insurance premiums and the like were sent out or renewed. But, back to the Michaelmas Daisy – this is part of the aster family and is a small bushy perennial with flowers in colours ranging from blues through to pinks and all having a small yellow centre surrounded by lots of narrow petals.

This daisy originates from the central and north-eastern United States and south-eastern Canada where it is a native plant. It has subsequently been introduced to Europe. Its seeds are a food source for songbirds and the nectar for bees, butterflies and moths. (Wikipedia also cites various pests and diseases but I won't depress you by listing them.) Among the indigenous North American people the plant has been used for medicinal purposes. A poultice of the roots can be used for pain, an infusion of the roots for diarrhoea, a decoction of roots and leaves to treat fevers. Smudging (i.e. burning the plant in a receptacle to produce smoke) has been used to revive unconscious people or as a fumigating reviver. The process can also be used with other substances in orchards to prevent damage from insects or frost. More intriguingly the Chippewa are reported to have smoked the roots in pipes to attract game. I had a sudden mental image of them all lolling about puffing on their pipes waiting for the game to come into shooting range, but then thought it was more likely to be a larger tubular pipe set over a fire to distribute the smoke into the air.

However, if you count a “daisy” to be any flower surrounded by many slim petals you can also include those such as rudbeckia, heleniums, simple chrysanthemums, gerberas and osteospermums. Perennials or annuals they can therefore keep a border looking colourful into autumn. They are all at their best this month and provide a wide colour palette of yellow, orange, bronze and red (rudbeckia, gerbera, helenium and simple chrysanthemums.) Sunflowers too are the epitome of sunshine and good cheer. They are grown commercially for their seeds and oil, and domestically for pleasure or competition – children especially enjoy seeing who can grow the tallest.

I remember Alan Titchmarsh once suggesting that instead of going to a garden centre and buying a collection of plants all at once you should go once a month and buy something that was in flower then. You would thus end up with some colour throughout the year. So, instead of “eat out to help out” perhaps we could “go crazy – buy a daisy” and do both to support your local garden centre!