



Vertical spikeage with *Lupinus* species 'Australia' (pg. 31) and *Linaria triornithophora* "Three Birds Flying" (available online).



Planting close together so no soil shows and flowers intermix is a cottage garden trademark. Seen here: *Nemophila menziesii* "Baby Blue Eyes" (pg. 5), perennial *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* (pg. 20) and *Malcomia maritima* (pg. 6).

How to have a Fabby Cottage Garden!



Here's a sad little tale I hear about once a week from someone visiting our nursery. "Boo-hoo-hoo. I've spent sooo much money on new plants and they look terrible — half of them are dead! I want my garden to look just like yours!"

I'm a nice person, so I always wrap my arm around their shoulder and feel their pain with them. "Yes, yes, it is so disappointing, isn't it?" And then in my softest, kindest granny voice I ask, "Can you tell me what kind of soil you have, dear?" Suddenly, the mood shifts. Tension is in the air as their eyes dart

furtively from side to side. "Um, er... well..."

"Is your soil mostly clay?" I query gently. "Yesssss!" she'll blurt out, embarrassed. When I tell her she's going to have to amend her soil if she wants happy plants and a pretty garden, she'll back away from me. "Do I haaaave to?"

"Yes, Virginia, you have to."

I adore cottage gardens because they're so freeing in terms of design. You can change them around every year or every season. You can let them get overgrown and it adds to their charm. You can cram loads of your favorite plants in willy-nilly and let them fight it out. You can even let the weeds run amuck a bit. **BUT if you want a luxurious showy cottage garden, you shall not ignore the soil.** Soil is numero uno. It is the garden god.

The plants you want to grow in your cottage garden will have roots. Big happy roots = big happy plants with lots of flowers and fewer pests. Roots need a loose medium to push out into. Clay soil does not

let them do this. Think of clay as squeezing the roots and choking them for air. Clay does not drain. That is bad.

The excellent news is **clay soil is EASY to FIX!** The answer is compost and lots of it (some folks think the answer is sand, as in sand = drainage. Just remember sand + clay = cement!). Buy the best compost you can get, generally one with some manure in it. Good compost provides lots of nitrogen, nutrients and texture to your clay.

If you're starting out with pure clay soil, add enough compost so your soil is at least half compost and half clay. Dig it in to at least 1.5' deep — the deeper the better. Break up the clods as best you can — you want soil that is easy to slide a shovel into. Ta — da! You're done for the moment. You can begin to plant your new area. After this, the big idea is to continually improve your soil. If you live in an area with a long gardening season like me, **add a 1" layer of compost to the top of your soil at least twice and even better, three times a year** (Spring, Summer and Fall). Just toss it on with a shovel and smush it around. No need to dig it in. The nutrients will leach down toward the roots and our friends the earthworms will come to the surface to munch on it, further aerating and fertilizing your soil. Isn't that nice? So let's say it together: "Soil is EVERYTHING!"

In the next part of this catalog, you'll find lots of great cottage garden plants to try. Remember, they're classics for a reason. They're easy, charming, they make nice cut flowers and usually self-sow. Many are deliciously fragrant and attract plenty of pollinators to the garden. As scientists are now raising the alarm over the greatly reduced numbers of pollinators, planting bee, bird and butterfly friendly gardens becomes even more important.

Planting in odd-numbered groups of 3, 5 or more looks better and more natural, just like the garden magazines say. Repeating plants here and there, even if it's just a single plant, brings it all together for the eye. Along with Roses, vertical accents are a must in the cottage garden, so plant upright spikers like *Verbascums*, *Hollyhocks* and *Lupines*. And don't forget the vines! They're so useful and so essential for creating cottage garden magic!

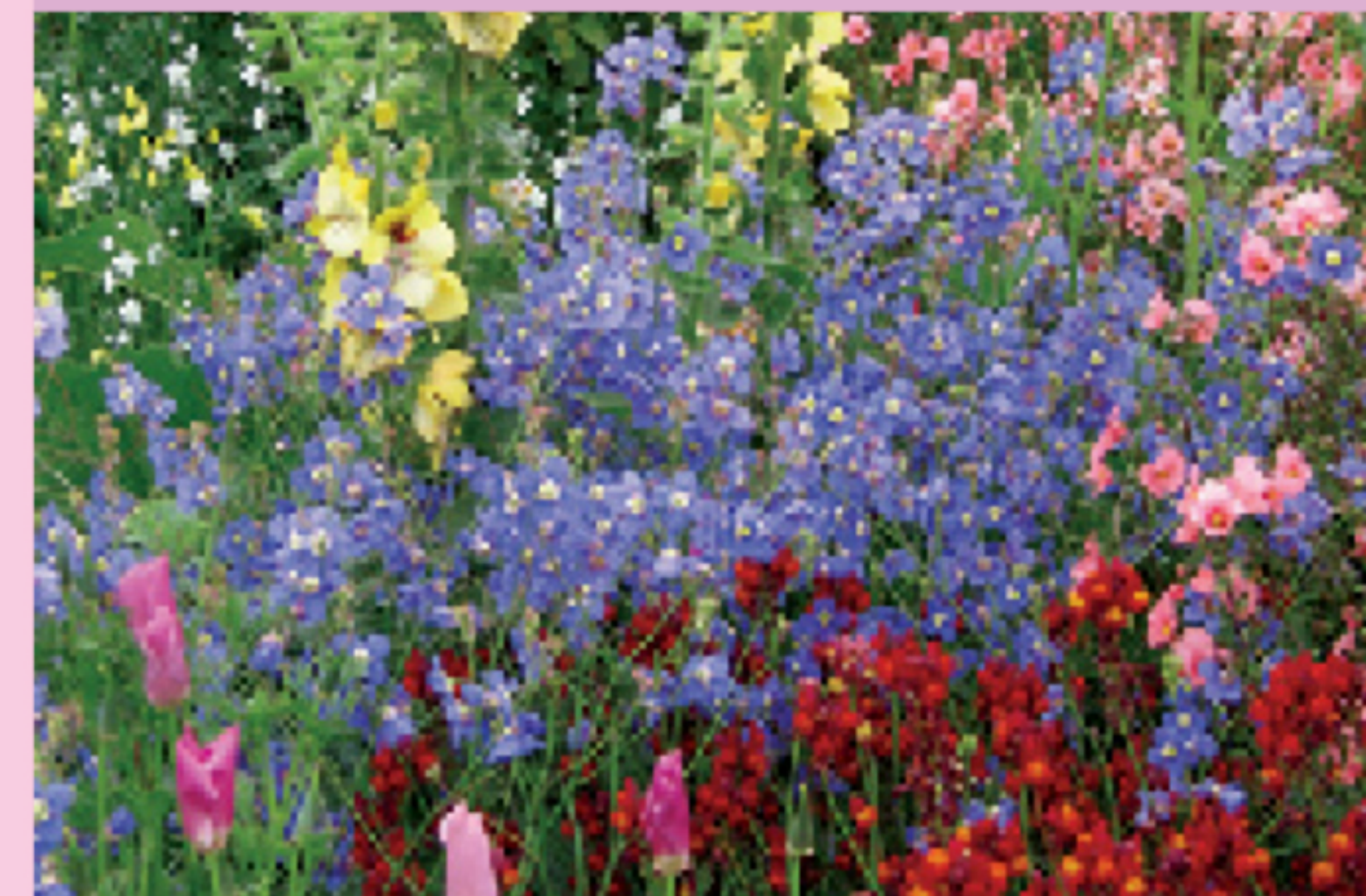
Happy Gardening!



When you group so many different plants together, something is always in bloom! Foreground: *Alonsoa meridonalis* 'Apricot' (pg. 26). Background: *Geranium maderense* (available online).



Combine your pink roses with *Nicotiana alata* 'Lime Green' (pg. 27) and underplant with fragrant frothy *Dianthus arenarius* (pg. 5).



Experiment with color and set your inner artist free! Left to right: yellow *Verbascum* sp. 'Cotswold King' (pg. 32), blue *Heliophila longifolia* (pg. 29) and *Alonsoa meridonalis* 'Apricot' (pg. 26) with red *Linaria reticulata* 'Flamenco' (pg. 12) in foreground.