



Ab fab Joanna Lumley celebrates her rebirth as a fuchsia with Emma (left) and Tony Hickman

WORDS BY EMMA TOWNSHEND

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PHOTOGRAPH BY SHARON PEARSON

Joanna in bloom

There are now fuchsia varieties named after Joanna Lumley, Gary Rhodes and even Ant and Dec... why?

Gary Rhodes is in my garden. However, he isn't putting the finishing touches to some fancy marinade for some line-caught sea bass. This afternoon, Gary Rhodes is a fancy pink-and-purple fuchsia; handsome admittedly, but certainly no chef.

What is going on with celebrity plant names? I can see the logic of the plants named after the great and the good. I have no objection to the sweet pea, fuchsia, rose and double daffodil named in honour of Sir Winston Churchill. Nor to Nigella "Miss Jekyll", or the Rose "Gertrude Jekyll", having myself drawn inspiration from the said Ms Jekyll's extraordinary gardens. I can even stand the odd royal – Princess Alexandra, for example, has a light-red floribunda named after her.

But what's with fuchsia "Gary Rhodes"?

After shooting off many emails to fuchsia enthusiasts, I received one back from Chris Martin, of Fuchsia Magic. He sends me off in pursuit of a wonderful old chap called Tony Hickman.

"First of all, you have to get their written permission," Hickman tells me. "And then you've got to try to find a flower which has some connection with their personality." So how did he choose the fuchsia that became Gary Rhodes? "Ah," he says, sagely, "well, it's aubergine, isn't it?"

But why don't breeders just call their creations after people they know? In some ways it's no surprise that breeders occasionally verge on desperation when naming new varieties. Dave Bates, a dahlia expert, reckons he knows of eight different "Normas" and 10 "Patricias".


Hickman's reasoning is personal: "When I did the big shows, we had Diana Dors, Arthur Askey and John Inman to present the medals. When I started breeding my own, I wanted to honour them."

A celebrity name helps to distinguish a plant by associating it with someone we already know. I have to confess that if there were a variety called "Coleen McLoughlin" I'd be buying that, just for the chuckle it would induce in me every time I came to water it. My mum recently confessed to having purchased a hosta called "Elvis Lives", on the basis of the name. And some celebrities are a godsend in marketing terms. The breeders of the Cattleya orchid "Martha Stewart" probably couldn't believe their luck when the American multimillionaire let them call a plant after her. All of a sudden there she was in the flesh, posing with the orchid and gaining it fabulous publicity. Similar delight lit up the faces of the breeders at the Chelsea Flower Show this year, as the "Joanna Lumley" fuchsia was launched with the real Joanna delightedly clutching her pink namesake.

There are some oddities, though. Peter Pears, the tenor who was Benjamin Britten's long-term lover, has a gladiolus

named after him. I know that gladioli are fairly camp, having been Morrissey's flower of choice, but Peter Pears? What connection can there be?

But if your tastes are more modern, don't worry. For 2008, Wyevalle will be bringing you none other than Fuchsia "Ant and Dec". Now I'm waiting for Suttons and Dobies and their compatriots to wake up to this coming market. A nice white Mimulus, to be marketed under the title "Arctic Monkey" maybe? Or perhaps something bright, brassy, and undeniably floral: the "MySpace Lily", after the lovely Miss Allen. ■

 **Further reading** Joanna Lumley's life in her own words, before she became a flower: 'No Room For Secrets' (Penguin)

In the name of the rose

Rose 'Rick Stein'

Orange hybrid tea rose (right).

Iris 'Agatha Christie'

A ruffled purple affair.

Hosta 'Captain Kirk'

Beam them slugs up, Scottie.

'Parky' white shrub rose

Introduced at Chelsea 2007 (right)



HEAVEN & HELL

Joanna Lumley

Great holidays...

Which was your best holiday?

Walking in the summertime with my husband in the Bernese Oberland, in the Swiss Alps. Walking is one of my favourite activities, and I love the mountains with their sheer expanse, breathtaking beauty and clear fresh air – they make me feel energised and alive.

And the best hotel you've stayed in?

The Four Seasons in New York, which is very elegant, divinely comfortable and has impeccable service. The hotel is in a fantastic location, right between Park Avenue and Madison, so it is the perfect base for a spot of shopping.

What do you need for a perfect holiday?

An adventurous companion with a sense of fun. I love exploring new places and little-known corners of the world, and need someone who is right there with me and is as adventurous as I am.

What do you always take with you?

My Rive Gauche and Vaseline.

What's your best piece of travel advice?

Be flexible, polite and interested. These three qualities will help you enjoy every experience to the maximum.

Where do you want to go next?

On a cruise to Iceland to see the Northern Lights. As I am now Godmother of the ocean liner Sea Princess, I hope to make this my first journey on her.

...and disasters?

Which was your worst holiday?

A cancelled holiday to Greece. There's nothing worse than planning a holiday and looking forward to it with great excitement, and then having to cancel.

And your worst experience on holiday?

A forgotten hotel in France, where the bed was like a tennis net and the walls ran with damp – definitely an experience I never want to repeat.

What's the biggest packing mistake you've made?

Forgetting to wrap my shampoo in a plastic bag and arriving for a grand dinner with all my clothes stuck together. Fortunately, I managed to save the dress.

Which is the worst hotel you've stayed in?

That one in France.

What do you avoid on holiday?

Crowds. I don't mind being in places where there are other travellers – this can add to the holiday experience, but I loathe overcrowded places, and much prefer being somewhere that is off the beaten track, or going somewhere just before the main season starts.

What do you hate about holidays?

I love everything about them. Holidays are a time of total, blissful indulgence and relaxation, of seeing new places and revisiting old favourites.

□ Joanna Lumley is the Godmother of the ocean liner



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□ Joanna Lumley is the Godmother of the ocean liner Sea Princess. For bookings, call 08453 555 800 or visit www.princesscruises.co.uk.

Interview by
Caroline Shearing

PICTURE: REUTERS

