

B2 First

- Listening Part 4 -

Interviewer: Monica, welcome to the programme. Your book *Make your garden unique* has been a great success. But why would people want to buy a book about gardening instead of just buying some plants and putting them in the ground?

Monica Darcey: Hello! Well, yes, I think that's what most people do when they move into a place, there's often little time to think. Lots of readers have written to me saying that's what they'd done, gone to a garden centre, spent a lot of money on seeds and plants, with not very good results. In fact I think people with that sort of experience make up the majority of my readers!

Interviewer: So, how did your interest in gardening start? Were your parents keen gardeners?

Monica Darcey: Well, people imagine I must come from a family of gardeners. In fact, my parents would have much rather seen me developing an interest in sport, as they were both water sports teachers. But I was forever catching colds and that put me off. Seeing me spending hours in the garden, showing little interest in the world outside plants was a cause for concern rather than pride for them though

Interviewer: And how did you go from gardener to writer?

Monica Darcey: Well, I did win a short-story prize at school, and enjoyed writing essays at college, but I had no real passion for writing then. I was making a good living looking after gardens. Then one day I was working in a nature reserve and I had to write about my day at work for an environmental project. It gave me such a feeling of achievement that when I saw an advert for a gardening journalist on a magazine, I applied, thinking I could do it in my spare time when I wasn't gardening.

Interviewer: And you got the job?

Monica Darcey: I did, but after a while they made me an editor, which was a kind of promotion, but editors tend to find themselves doing everything but writing, and I'm happiest when being creative, so I decided it was time for a change. My bosses weren't very happy about it, I must say. So I went back to working all hours planting trees and flowers.

Interviewer: And that's when you starting writing your book, is that right?

Monica Darcey: Yes, and I've never looked back, really. I'm now writing my second book, about gardens around the world.

Interviewer: So, what makes your gardening books so special for readers?

Monica Darcey: It takes years of experience to learn to write attractively. It must flow perfectly when you read it, as if it had required no effort at all. But to answer your question, I suppose it's the fact that I'm not merely providing information, because that would make a jolly dull piece of writing - I don't assume everyone's fascinated by gardening, and I include some interviews, the kind of personal experience that may amuse the reader. Of course the information is all correct, and well researched, but that has to be the case with any serious writer.

Interviewer: Do you choose the photographs for your books?

Monica Darcey: I do. The quality of photography is excellent now of course. It's been a fantastic development in that it's brought many more people into gardening. Magazines and books devote a lot of space to photography, and quite rightly. But the pictures often show how things might be, rather than how they are, that's my only criticism. The writing's still the important part though, readers don't just buy beautiful pictures.

Interviewer: Finally, we've heard you've been asked to take part in a TV programme.

Monica Darcey: I have, and I'm still thinking about it. The idea is that I'd interview people who've designed some of the most amazing gardens in Europe - it would get me away from my writing routine which does get a bit too much at times, and it would give me plenty of ideas. It's also true that such a programme can make you into a kind of celebrity, and I'm not sure I'm ready for that, you know, you start being recognised in the street. Although my publisher says that that's something I should be really happy about!