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GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

Fresh take

NEW GARDENS, PLANTS, PEOPLE AND IDEAS FOR THE NEW SEASON

with Mary Berry
Nigel Slater
Butter Wakefield
Jack Wallington

SPRING BLING

The best plants for blossom

TOP 10

ROSY HARDY'S MEGASTARS FOR MARCH

TASK MASTER

Inside a head gardener's to-do list for an extraordinary English garden



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Welcome

By the time it gets to March, many of us gardeners are itching to get going and growing, sowing and planting, pruning and mowing. The weather may conspire against us, but there is nowhere we would rather be than out in the elements, invigorated and ready for the burst of energy that comes with spring.

So, this issue, we are celebrating all things new as we kick off the growing season. We've got new columns and series, such as nurserywoman Rosy Hardy's top plant picks for the month (page 18) and designer Jack Wallington's first 'Final say' column (page 114). We are featuring a bevy of new, beautiful gardens to inspire you, from Butter Wakefield's grand country design (page 54) to Matthew Childs' small suburban surprise (page 70), and an ambitious city plot by Tony Woods (page 86).

Discover the best new plants to grow (page 95) and new gardens to visit this year (page 11) plus new horticultural talent in Daniel Carlson (page 53) and crocus grower David Carver (page 62).

There's also our fresh practical-tasks series from Mounton House where we will be dropping in throughout the year to see what head of gardens Tim Stretton and his team are doing each season (page 30). An Edwardian garden, lovingly restored by Arne Maynard, it is rarely open to visitors, but you can now book your spot on our special reader event there on 3 June – find out more on page 38.



JOHN CAMPBELL

Stephanie Mahon

STEPHANIE MAHON, EDITOR

DISCOVER MORE GI



JOHN CAMPBELL

PODCAST Talking Gardens returns for its sixth season on 24 March with new guests including Adam Frost and Luciano Giubbilei. Catch up with previous guests such as Dan Pearson (above) while you wait.



JOHN CAMPBELL

GI ACADEMY We've made all our past Masterclass talks available on demand, from behind the scenes with Piet Oudolf to roses with Jenny Barnes (above), Tom Stuart-Smith on design and Fergus Garrett on planting.



JOHN CAMPBELL

VIDEO Watch our step-by-step guide to planting a waterlily to accompany Tim Stretton's advice in our new practical-tasks series on page 30 from Mounton House.



JASON INGRAM

INSIGHTS Discover the professional design theories and inside secrets that garden designers use to create their exquisite spaces in this article, exclusively on our website.

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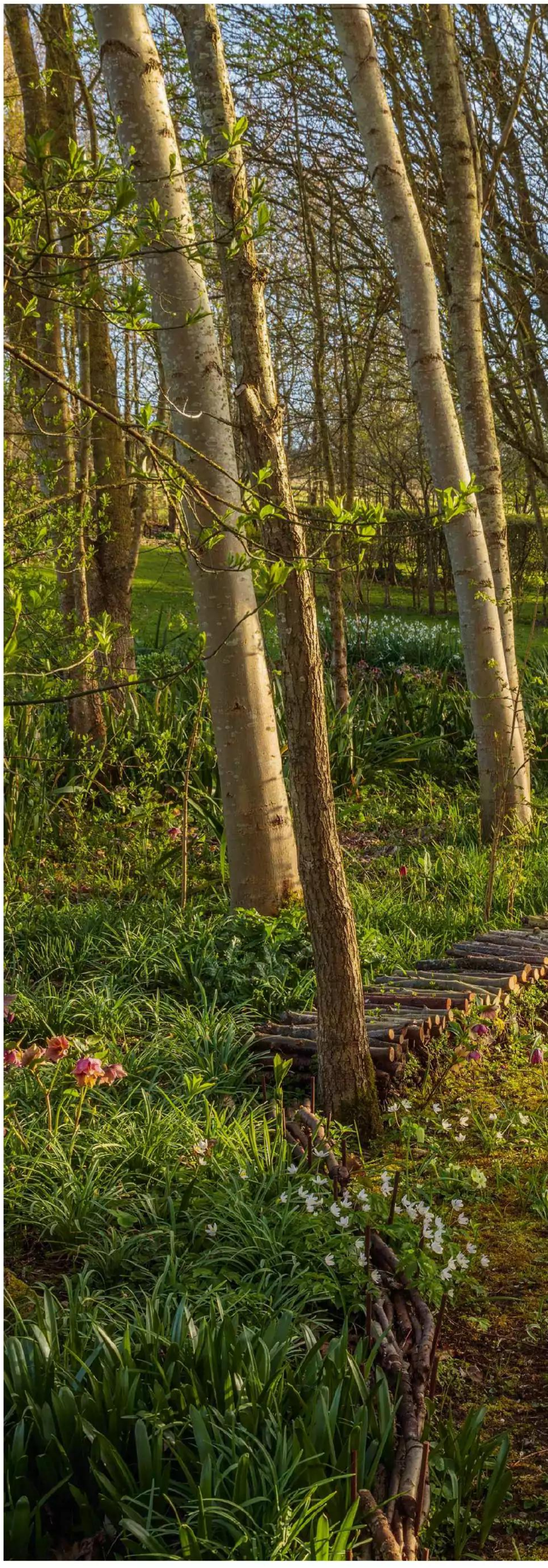
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CLIVE NICHOLS



Carefully placed logs among trees planted as saplings add charm to James and Emma Chua's garden, page 78.

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SEE PAGE 28

COVER IMAGE

Surrey garden designed by Matthew Childs. Photograph by Alister Thorpe (page 70).

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EVENTS AND OFFERS

- Save money when you subscribe to the digital edition of *Gardens Illustrated* – page 28
- Join us for our reader event at Mounton House in Monmouthshire, restored by Arne Maynard – page 38

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MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

WHERE HOPE GROWS

When garden designer Kate was diagnosed with cancer it signalled a new chapter of her life

Kate was living with her wife, and their young son, in Shoreham-by-Sea, and working as a social worker for Brighton & Hove City Council. "Life was good," says Kate. "Then a cancer diagnosis suddenly brought uncertainty."

Here, Kate shares her experience of the shock of diagnosis. She reveals how spending time in nature played a crucial role in helping her to heal, and how Macmillan Cancer Support provided the space and guidance she needed to make life-shaping changes during a time of uncertainty.

From calm to chaos

Kate had been having regular mammograms through a genetic screening programme. It was after one of these mammograms she received a letter saying further investigation was needed.

"At the beginning of a cancer journey, there isn't a lot of information," Kate says of the chaos that ensued. "It's like the life you thought you had has been thrown up in the air and you aren't sure where the pieces will land."

While waiting for a hospital appointment, Kate and her wife were told about the Macmillan Horizon Centre, a dedicated support centre for those affected by cancer offering a range of services, from acupuncture to advice. "We walked in and it was a different world," says Kate. "That was our introduction to Macmillan."

Space to think and heal

Over one third of Macmillan services, such as those offered at the Horizon Centre, are funded by gifts in wills. As well as practical advice, therapeutic support and a safe place to exercise, the Horizon Centre offered Kate respite with a beautiful rooftop garden.

Kate found that taking space to heal physically and psychologically was important during her cancer journey. "The Horizon Centre was a place that gave me that space. I have friends who design gardens and the idea began to grow that this was something that I could do too. Cancer gave me a new focus and desire to create gardens that make a difference."

The Horizon Centre had given her opportunity amid the uncertainty to "percolate new ideas… it provided something that wasn't medical," says Kate. "It was human. Human and healing."

Rooted in nature

Inspired, Kate studied for a diploma in garden design, and launched her own design business, KM Garden Design. "My work as a designer is all about connecting people, places and nature," she says. "My 25 years as a social worker solidified my awareness of the importance of green spaces for our mental health and connections in our communities." Inspired by the designs of Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg of Harris Bugg Studio, Kate creates gardens "with a deep sense of place and that heal and restore". Her local landscape in West Sussex is another source of inspiration: the red valerian, silver ragwort and sea kale that brighten Shoreham Beach in May; the orchids, horseshoe vetch and milkwort that adorn local nature reserve Mill Hill in the summer.

"I think you see nature in a different way after a diagnosis of cancer," she says. "Whether it's the vastness of a range of mountains or the minutiae of a bee in the garden. Seeing backlit fresh green leaves and watching the sunset feels richer than ever."

New beginnings

Happily, Kate completed her cancer treatment. She has been cancer-free for many years and is enjoying the rewards of a new life in garden design. She says her cancer diagnosis proved to be the "punctuation mark" she needed to take the leap into garden design. The services offered by Macmillan Cancer Support at the Horizon Centre gave her the safety and kindness required to make those choices.

Over one third of Macmillan's income comes from legacy giving, helping to fund services like the Horizon Centre. Kate has a special message for those who have already left a gift in their will: "There's a saying that true generosity is planting a tree under whose shade you know you will never sit. And you did that for me and my family. Your gift allowed us to find peace and humanity during some of the darkest days of our lives. Thank you."

And for those considering leaving a gift in their will to Macmillan? "Macmillan offered me sanctuary in my storm, and they want to be there for all of us… leaving a gift to Macmillan in your will means that you will bring light into someone's darkest days, even long after you have gone."

A gift in your will

Macmillan's support helped Kate find the space and calm she needed when it mattered the most. A gift in your will makes it possible for Macmillan to do whatever it takes to help more people with cancer get the best care the UK has to offer, whoever and wherever they are. To find out more about how to leave a gift in your will to Macmillan Cancer Support, order your free Gifts in Wills guide from **macmillan.org.uk/legacypledge** or call **0800 542 0164**.

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Kate: “Cancer inspired me to create gardens that make a difference”



Design: Megan Hadadi

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Contributors





TRACEY RICH



Rosy Hardy
Rosy shares her top ten plants for March, page 18. *"Being able to showcase so many wonderful plants for everyone to enjoy as much as I do has been a great experience."*

Lindon Hayes
Lindon illustrates Nigel Slater's column, page 41. *"Delighted to be a new contributor, getting to grips with my traditional hand-rendering techniques to help bring Nigel's column to life."*

Jack Wallington
In the first of his new column, Jack advises taking a more considered approach, page 114. *"By simplifying plans for our gardens, they often have more impact."*

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ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Charlotte Harris
Charlotte co-founded the values-driven landscape design practice Harris Bugg Studio with Hugo Bugg in 2017. She has won three Gold medals at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, as well as Best Show Garden in 2023.

Fergus Garrett
Fergus was appointed head gardener at Great Dixter by Christopher Lloyd in 1993 and is now CEO of the garden's Charitable Trust. He was awarded an RHS Associate of Honour in 2008 and an RHS Victoria Medal of Honour in 2019.

James Basson
James lives in the South of France where he runs Scape Design, a practice for creating sustainable landscapes. The winner of four Chelsea Gold medals, he was awarded Best Show Garden in 2017.

Anna Pavord
Anna was *The Independent*'s gardening correspondent for 30 years and is the author of the bestselling book *The Tulip*. In 2000 the RHS awarded her the Veitch Memorial Medal. She lives and gardens in Dorset.

Dan Pearson
Dan is one of the UK's best-known garden designers. Among his many award-winning gardens is the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan. He was awarded an OBE in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to horticulture.

Sarah Price
Sarah is one of the UK's most sought-after garden designers. She won Gold at Chelsea in 2012, 2018 and 2023, and was GMG Garden Columnist of the Year in 2016 for her design series in *Gardens Illustrated*.

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DIG IN

What's new, what's growing and what's going on this month

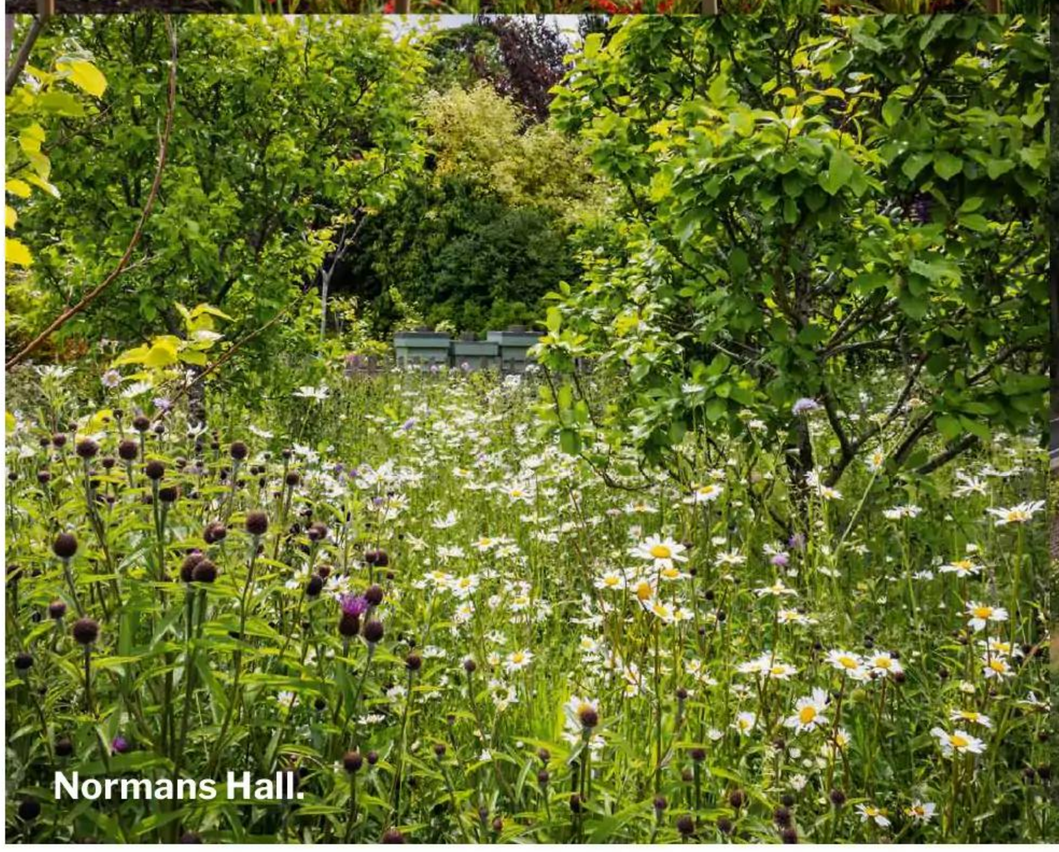
COMPILED BY **ALICE TUFFERY**



Kew's Carbon Garden.



Bowood's walled garden.



Normans Hall.



Cliveden's Long Garden.

KEW CARBON GARDEN: JEFF EDEN, NORMANS HALL: LIZ MITCHELL, CLIVEDEN LONG GARDEN: JAMES DOBSON / NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES

OUT AND ABOUT

NEW LOOKS

This issue, we're celebrating all things new, so why not explore some of the exciting new gardens that are open to visitors this year? New gardens in London include the forward-looking Carbon Garden, with its striking central pavilion, which opened at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, last summer and on the South Bank the National Theatre's Natural Dye and Wellbeing Garden, which is growing plants to colour costumes. Outside of the capital, check out Joe Perkins' innovative Garden for the Future at Sheffield Park and Garden in East Sussex, and Cliveden's newly transformed Long Garden in Buckinghamshire, which has replaced annuals with pollinator-friendly perennials. Raby Castle in County Durham and luxury hotel Bowood House in Wiltshire are both showcasing redesigned walled gardens. Later in the year, be sure to visit Jo Thompson's new winter garden at RHS Garden Rosemoor in Devon. There are also several established plots opening for the National Garden Scheme for the first time this year, including the woodland and herbaceous gardens at Normans Hall in Cheshire. There's plenty to admire abroad too, including Piet Oudolf's gardens for the Vandalorum Museum of Art and Design in Sweden.

Read our full list of 20 new gardens to visit this year at **gardensillustrated.com/new-gardens-2026**

EVENTS

On the road again

The Plant Fairs Roadshow is back for 2026, offering the chance to buy rare specimens, talk to specialist growers and explore some impressive gardens at their seasonal peak throughout the year. This month (22 March) sees a rare spring bulb sale at Hever Castle during its Dazzling Daffodils festival, while next month (19 April), there's a chance to explore the dramatic Arundel Castle garden (pictured) during its fabulous Tulip Festival. In London, the Inner Temple Gardens will host the Roadshow for the first time (31 May), and the Horniman Museum plays host twice (4 April and 5 September). Other highlights include Ramster Garden in Surrey (26 April), Borde Hill Garden in West Sussex (10 May and 20 September), Parham House (5 July), Tom Stuart-Smith's Serge Hill Project in Hertfordshire (26 July) and West Dean Gardens in West Sussex (13 September), before the tour concludes at Mount Ephraim in Kent (27 September). Find details at **plantfairsroadshow.co.uk**

VIKKI RIMMER



PLANTS

HOME COMFORTS

Houseplants surged in popularity during the pandemic but according to the RHS our love of them shows no sign of waning. Over the past year, it saw a 15 per cent increase in houseplant sales, beating bedding plants and herbs, and noticed a 76 per cent rise in searches for houseplant advice on its website. Its advisory team also received ten times more houseplant enquiries from RHS members than the year before. This year it is predicting that bonsai, ferns and calatheas will become the most popular houseplants, although long-time favourites Monstera *and* Dracaena*, which topped this year's list, are sure to remain popular choices.* ***rhs.org***

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JONATHAN BUCKLEY

COLLECTIONS

FAMOUS FIVE

Dahlia lovers will be excited to discover Sarah Raven's latest collection of expert-approved plant combinations. Sarah, who has personally bred and introduced more than 100 dahlia cultivars, has called upon a Collective of five tastemakers with a flair for colour. Their ready-made dahlia groupings combine brilliantly, and range from the confident pinks (above) of Designers Guild founder Tricia Guild to the blush-and-yellow mix from fashion icon Lucinda Chambers. The Collective also includes garden designer Butter Wakefield, Boden founder Johnnie Boden and fashion designer Patrick Grant. Collections start at £25.95. sarahraven.com



JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

CAMPAIGN

POSITIVE ACTION

Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of the seminal 2013 book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, has launched a global grassroots movement with the aim of combating the destructive practices and worldviews threatening our planet. Plant Baby Plant – a direct response to the US Republican campaign slogan of 'drill, baby, drill' – is designed to counter feelings of powerlessness with information and inspiration. Through her mantra, 'raise a garden and raise a ruckus', Robin encourages others to take meaningful, regenerative action in support of conservation and climate resilience in their own neighbourhoods. Visit the Plant Baby Plant website to find resources, success stories and suggestions, such as growing native plants, organising community seed swaps and contacting local officials. **plantbabyplant.com**

What to do this month



FROM 14 MARCH Sounds of Blossom Admire magnolia and cherry blossoms with a soundtrack from Royal College of Music students. 11am-6pm. Entry included with Kew admission. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, London TW9 3AE. Tel 020 8332 5655, **kew.org**



SOUNDS OF BLOSSOM: INES STUART-DAVIDSON, CORNWALL GC SPRING SHOW: ADJ BROWN, MILL EXHIBITION: PAUL HARRIS / NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES

28-29 MARCH Cornwall Garden Society Spring Flower Show Find rare plants and inspiring show gardens, with expert talks and workshops. £8. 10am-5pm (Sat); to 4pm (Sun). Royal Cornwall Showground, Whitecross, Wadebridge, Cornwall PL27 7JE. **cornwallgardensociety.org.uk**



UNTIL 26 APRIL Peat Appreciation Society Discover the importance of peatland conservation in this art exhibition inspired by West Yorkshire moors. Gibson Mill, Midgehole Road, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire HX7 7AW. Tel 01422 844518, **nationaltrust.org.uk**

For more events this month and throughout the year, scan the QR code with your phone camera or visit **gardensillustrated.com/events-and-shows**



GARY STONE

PLANTS

INSIDE OUT

A women's prison in Gloucestershire has become one of five new National Plant Collection holders, for its *Agastache* collection. Prisoners at HMP Eastwood Park spotted the pollinator-friendly plant on Plant Heritage's Missing Collections list, and decided to help safeguard its future by growing it in the prison's biodiverse garden, which provides prisoners with educational opportunities and invaluable support for their mental health. This is the prison's second National Collection, after its *Tulbaghia* collection awarded in 2024. **plantheritage.org.uk**



FELIXX

DESIGN

RICH PICKINGS

A new 37-acre urban food forest in the Netherlands, which features more than 100 fruit trees and 200 species of edible plants, shows how it's possible to create a balance between humans and nature in cities. Everyone in the Utrecht neighbourhood of Rijnvliet is free to collect fruit, vegetables and herbs from the forest, guided by information boards, a tree map and a dedicated app. New residents receive a cookbook with recipes that make use of what is grown, and group chats let locals discuss day-to-day harvesting. **felixx.nl**



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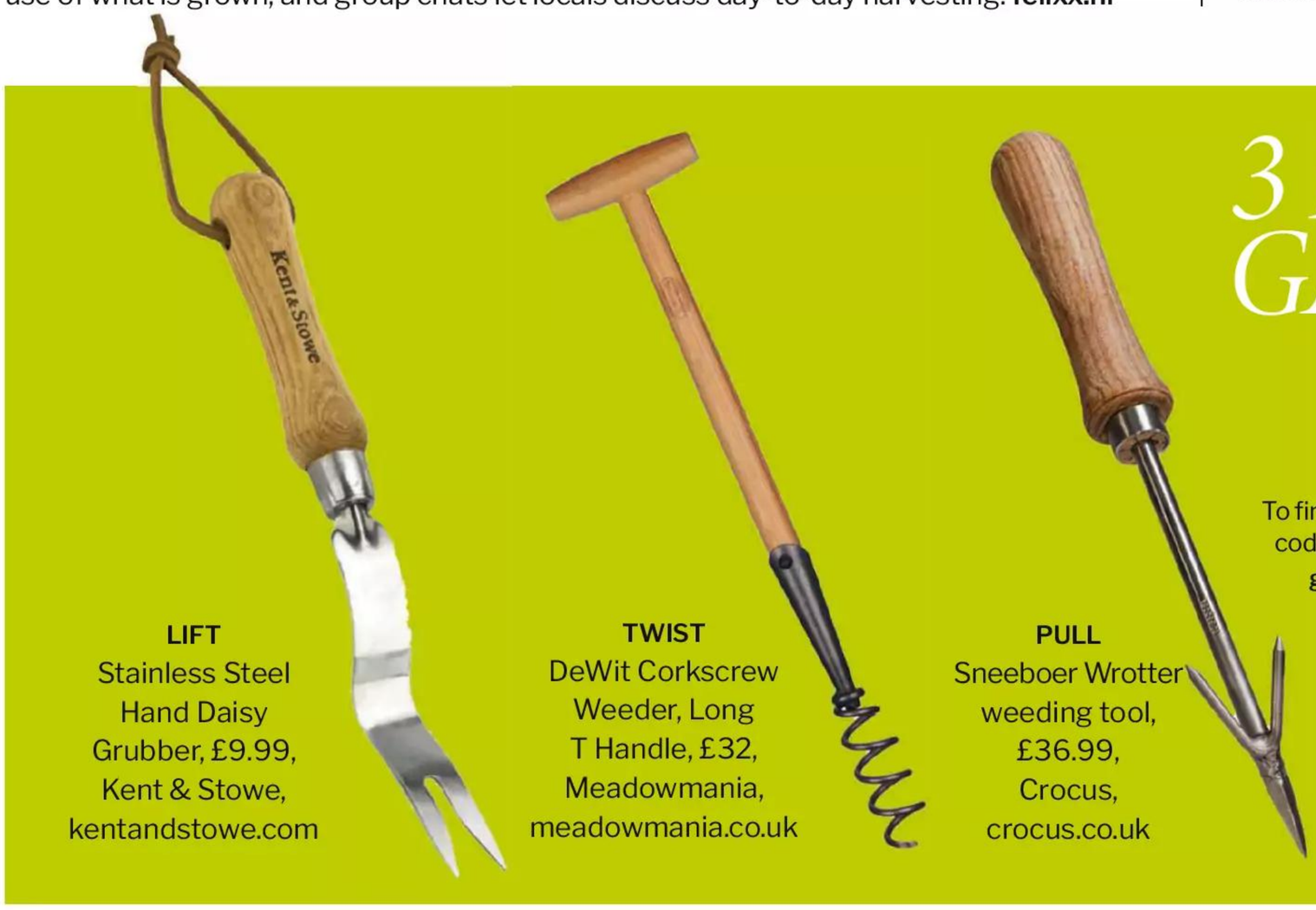
FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Sanderson has launched its second collection in partnership with the National Trust. The fabric designs are inspired by conservation work at Brockhampton in Herefordshire. Patterns include Moat Birds (shown above), which is taken from an archival block print and shows ducks on a moat-like river, and the hand-painted Paradise Woods, which interprets an archival Toile de Jouy to reflect the estate's ongoing work to protect birds such as house martins and finches. Prices start at £74 per metre. Tel 020 3457 5862, ***sanderson.design***

3 FOR THE GARDEN...

WEEDING TOOLS

To find more garden weeders, scan the QR code with your phone camera or head to **gardensillustrated.com/weeders**



LIFT
Stainless Steel Hand Daisy Grubber, £9.99, Kent & Stowe, kentandstowe.com

TWIST
DeWit Corkscrew Weeder, Long T Handle, £32, Meadowmania, meadowmania.co.uk

PULL
Sneeboer Wrotter weeding tool, £36.99, Crocus, crocus.co.uk

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ANEMONE BLANDA

This spring jewel is so wonderful when it pops up in gardens, whether it is planted in borders or in areas of grass – as it is just as happy in both. The foliage will start with a slight purple tone and then turn green as the flowers, which are held above the foliage, open during the day. The beautiful multi-petalled, almost daisy-like blooms last for a long time in spring. The lilac-blue colour shows up well under deciduous shrubs, trees or in the grass. It can be grown in shady areas or full sun, and most soils. AGM*.

Height and spread 15cm x 15cm.
Origin Southeastern Europe, Middle East, Greece, the Caucasus, Lebanon and Syria.
Conditions Well-drained soil; sun to shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b†.
Season of interest March – April.



March plants

Nurserywoman **Rosy Hardy** welcomes early spring with some scented flowers in cool pastel colours, offset with fresh evergreen foliage

PHOTOGRAPHS DIANNA JAZWINSKI PORTRAIT CHARLIE HOPKINSON

Rosy Hardy is partner at Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants in Hampshire.
hardysplants.co.uk



BLECHNUM SPICANT

What a fantastic fern the deer fern is, both for planting out in a shady border or for using in container displays. At the start of the season its erect fronds emerge a beautiful, pale lime-green colour, which over time matures to a wonderful dark green for the rest of the year, before its fronds wither into attractive skeletons. Truly a great fern for shade or part shade creating a good mid-size mound, even if not evergreen. Native to the UK, it prefers neutral to acidic soils. AGM.

Height and spread 50cm x 50cm.
Origin Northern Hemisphere, including Europe, Asia, North Africa and western North America.
Conditions Neutral-to-acidic, moist but well-drained soil; part to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.
Season of interest Year round.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

IRIS LAZICA

This spring beauty has gorgeous pale-lilac flowers with bands of yellow on the falls, and is a fabulous plant for those unable to grow its sun-loving, winter-flowering cousin, *Iris unguicularis*. The beauty of *Iris lazica*, which hails from the Transcaucasus and Turkey, is that it will tolerate shady spots and can grow in quite heavy soil while still flowering wonderfully in the spring. It also boasts good evergreen strap-like foliage for the rest of the season. Clumps can easily be divided and the best time to do so is early autumn. AGM.

Height and spread 30-50cm x 50cm.
Origin Northeast Turkey and Georgia.
Conditions Neutral-to-alkaline, moist but well-drained soil; dappled shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 8a-10b.
Season of interest January – March.





SAXIFRAGA OPPOSITIFOLIA 'VACCARIANA'

This wonderful, large-flowered form of the purple mountain saxifrage has delicate, magenta-pink flowers and is very early to flower in spring. It also has wonderful, nearly evergreen, dark-green foliage that hugs the ground, creating a small mound-like mat – and gives the impression that its star-shaped pink flowers are floating on top of the green leaves. An incredibly useful alpine that does prefer a semi-shady place to grow in reasonable soil.

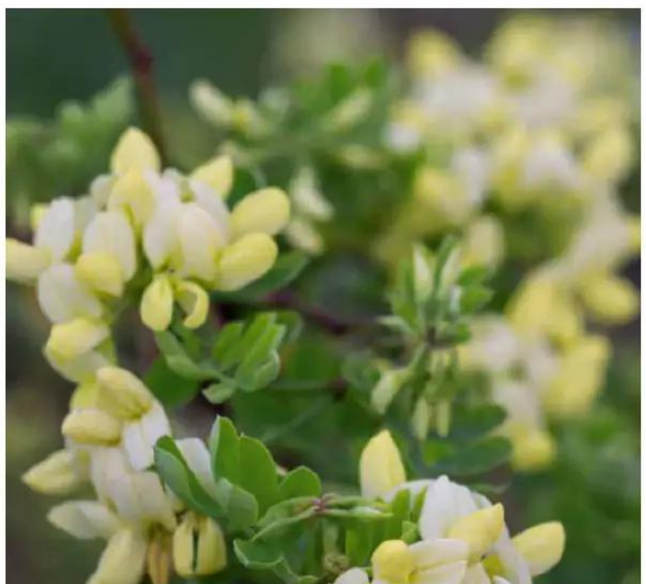
Height and spread 5cm x 20cm.
Origin Arctic and alpine regions of the Northern Hemisphere.
Conditions Alkaline, well-drained soil; part shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 2a-8b.
Season of interest March – April.

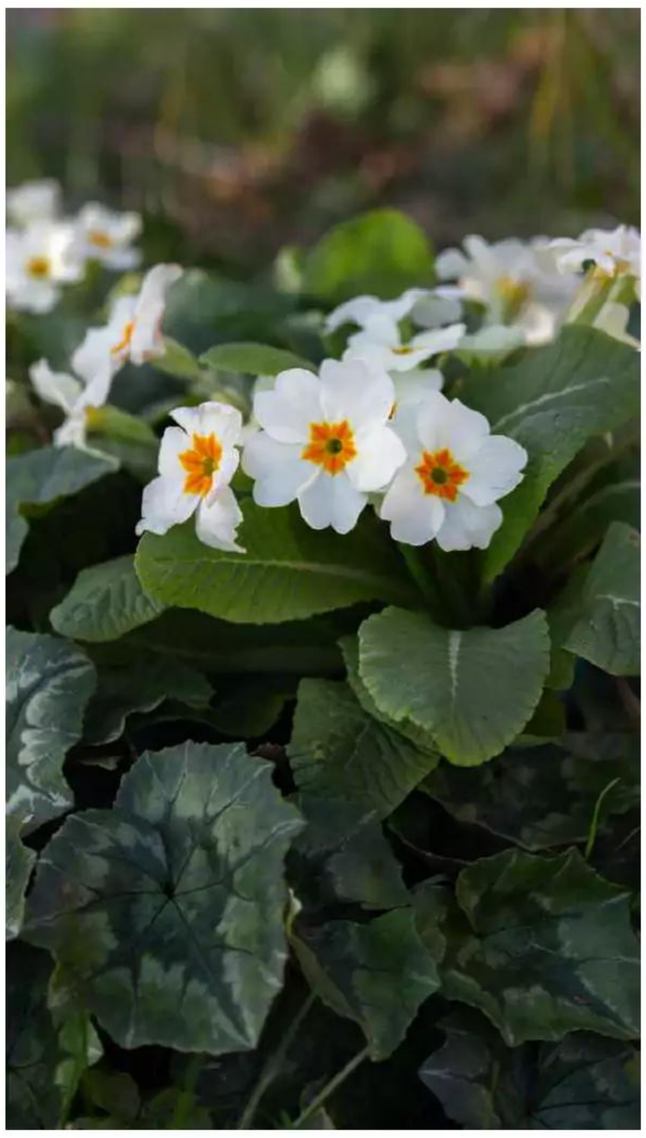
A selected form of our common primrose with wonderful, large, cream flowers for a long period in spring

CORONILLA VALENTINA SUBSP. *GLAUCA* 'CITRINA'

The perfume from this shrub is one of the main reasons for growing it. Often grown in containers, which can be moved to a protected space when the winter weather is harsh. It has a tendency to get leggy, but this can be corrected by regularly pruning three to four times throughout the year. Reducing branches by a third to a half will encourage a better growing habit, but this does mean pruning when it is in flower. AGM.

Height and spread 90cm x 90cm.
Origin Europe, Transcaucasus and North Africa.
Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; sunny spot in sheltered conditions.
Hardiness RHS H4, USDA 8a-10b.
Season of interest December – April.





PRIMULA 'HERITAGE CREAM'

A selected form of our common primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) with wonderful, large, cream flowers for a long period in spring. Works well in a container but also in the ground to lighten up the dark spots in a garden. Most primulas like some direct sunlight in the flowering season, but then shade for the rest of the year; this can be achieved by planting near or under deciduous trees or shrubs. To keep these true to form, division is you best way of propagation as seed is rarely set.

Height and spread 15cm x 20cm.
Origin Europe, western Asia and North Africa.
Conditions Moist but well-drained soil, any pH; part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest January – March.

RANUNCULUS GRAMINEUS

A buttercup with a difference. Unlike a lot of its relatives, this wonderful perennial is a clump former and does not spread around taking over lawns and borders. Also, it does not have the palmate leaf as can be noted from its species name *gramineus*, which means grass-like. The foliage is long and slender, with a slightly grey colour, which indicates that it would ideally like to be in drier growing conditions. These plants are from Mediterranean climate zones and as such are used to stony, free-draining soil in full sun. AGM.

Height and spread 45cm x 45cm.
Origin Western Mediterranean.
Conditions Well-drained soil; sun.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 7a-10b.
Season of interest March – June.



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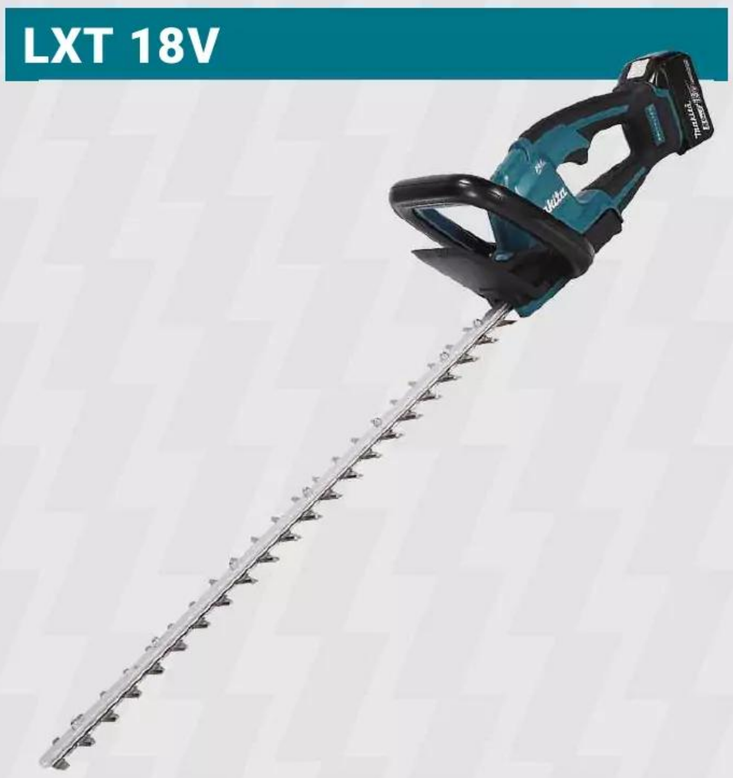


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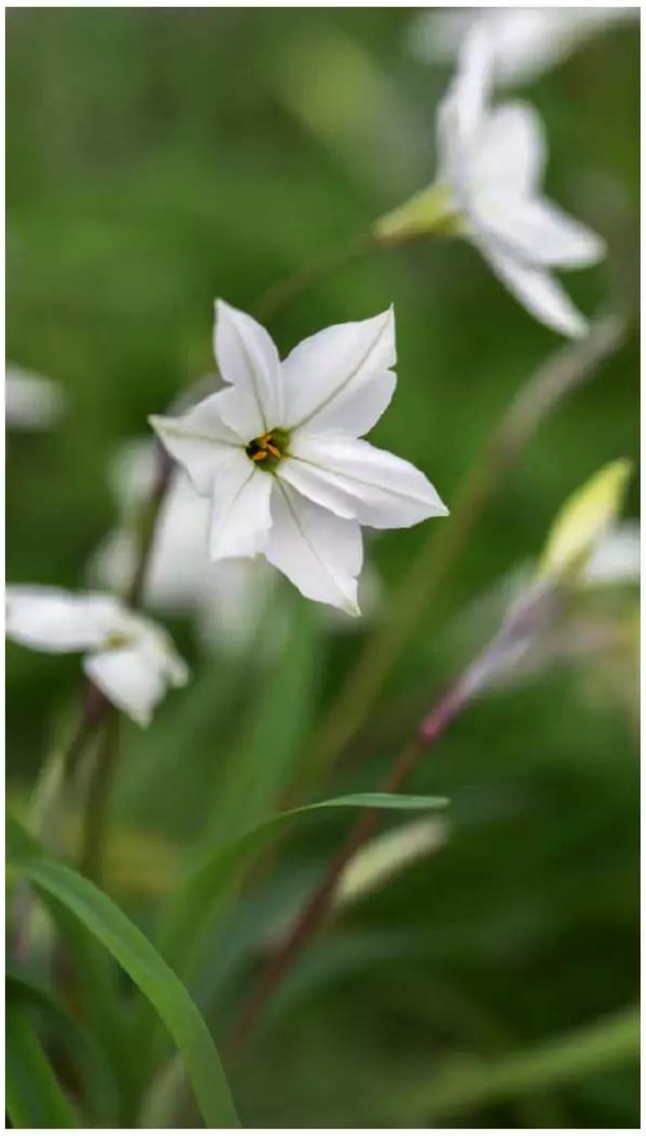
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This beautiful, fully double-flowered form of our native violet is worth growing if only for its scent



VIOLA ODORATA
'KING OF VIOLETS'

This beautiful, fully double-flowered form of our native violet is worth growing if only for its scent. It smells of true violets, and the perfume is better in the afternoon especially on a warm spring day. The blooms are pale lilac over heart-shaped, mid-green leaves that are deciduous. It should be planted in shady spots and makes a good groundcover under ferns or hostas. Grow it in pots or hanging baskets, which will bring the scented flowers closer to the eye and nose.

Height and spread 15cm x 30cm.
Origin Europe, northwest Africa and western Asia.
Conditions Fertile soil; part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.
Season of interest February – March.



IPHEION 'ALBERTO CASTILLO'

My favourite of this group of plants, as it has everything for spring. Named for José Alberto Castillo, curator of the Jardín Botánico de Ezeiza near Buenos Aires, its flowers are a clean, crisp cream-white and a good large size, held on long wiry stems well above the leaves. It has a beautiful honey scent and is a great feed plant for all beneficial insects. I love watching bumble bees land on the flowers – the stem bends over in an arc until the bee has finished drinking the nectar, flies off and the flower pings back upright. AGM.

Height and spread 15cm x 30cm.
Origin Argentina and Uruguay.
Conditions Moist but well-drained soil, any pH; sun.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 6a-9b.
Season of interest March – May.



PACHYPHRAGMA MACROPHYLLUM

An extremely underused lower-storey plant that is perfect for using for under trees and shrubs, and which flowers profusely throughout March and April. The lovely glossy leaves are evergreen and perfectly offset the white flowers. Once it has finished flowering, the stems can be removed, and by the end of winter the old leaves can look a little bit tatty, so removal is good to allow new clean growth. It requires moisture and a good humus-rich soil, so add plenty of organic matter, including leaf litter.

Height and spread 40cm x 10cm.
Origin Turkey and the Caucasus.
Conditions Moist, humus-rich soil, any pH; shade to part-shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 6a-9b.
Season of interest March – April.

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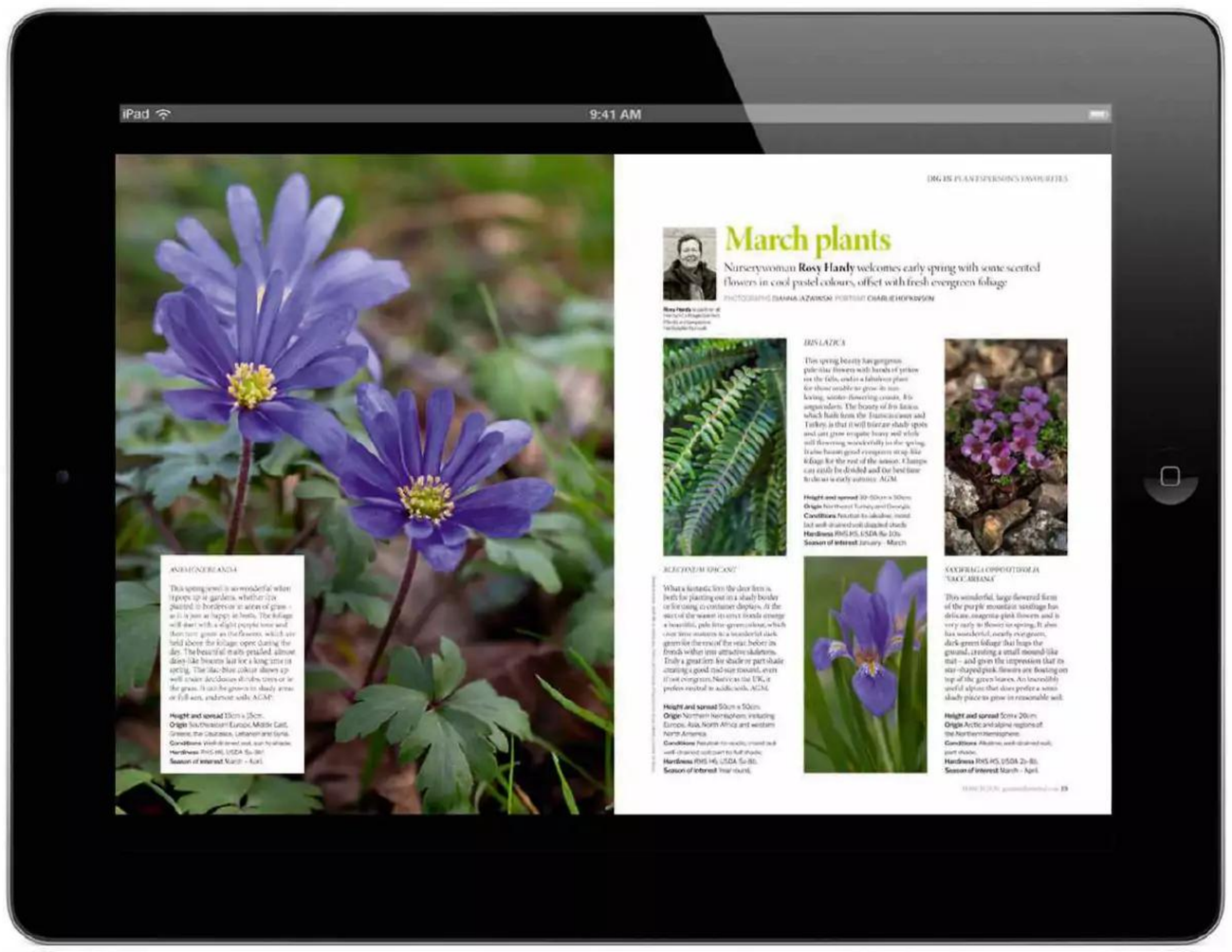
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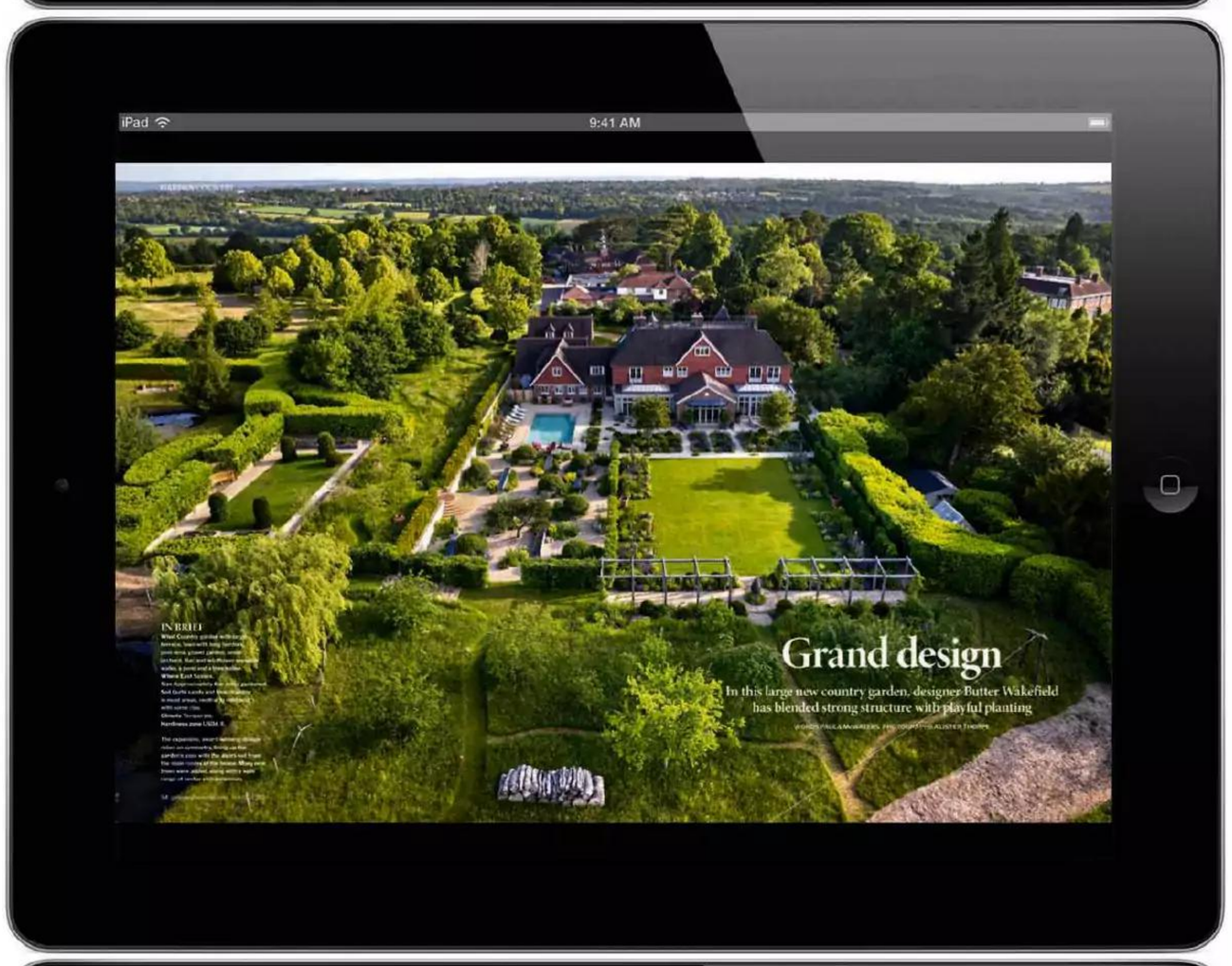
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New beginnings

In the first of a new practical series, **Tim Stretton**, head of gardens at Mounton House in Monmouthshire, shares the tasks that he and his team tackle in spring

PHOTOGRAPHS **JOHN CAMPBELL**

As the long nights shorten, Mounton House garden quietly emerges from winter with delicate sprinklings of white narcissi, *Scilla siberica* and crocuses through the lawns. Daphnes fill the air with fragrance, and the green shoots of herbaceous perennials begin to poke up through the mulch between hellebores and cyclamen.

The new leaves of acers and sprays of cherry blossom add colour to the Rock Garden, which features an exciting understorey of choice *Iris reticulata*, candelabra primulas and lime-green euphorbias in spring. As the season progresses, the Tea House borders take the lead with elegant tulips in shades of purple, and the pots on the Southern Terrace and in the Pergola Garden pop with daffodils, tulips and winter foliage in complementary colours.

A striking *Magnolia* x *soulangeana* with its light-pink flowers dominates the main herbaceous border below the Southern Terrace, which is slowly coming to life with drifts of *Muscari* and *Scilla* for early interest. On garden walls, the fresh, luxuriant foliage of climbing roses begins to fill in the empty space, and warm the soul.

It's my favourite time of the year in the garden, even though spring at Mounton House can be unpredictable. Over the past ▷

In spring, a mix of richly coloured wallflowers and tulips, including *Tulipa* 'Queen of Night', *T.* 'Burgundy' and *T.* 'Merlot', fill the Tea House borders.

Prunus 'Beni-yutaka' and *Primula japonica* 'Miller's Crimson' add colour to the Rock Garden alongside *Matteuccia struthiopteris* and a variety of different acers.

▷ two years, we've had an intensely wet season, which resulted in dismal tulip displays, and a dry few months the following year, with watering commencing at the back end of March.

The key takeaway in our changeable climate is to be prepared for any eventuality. One of our goals is to fortify Mounton with a healthy and resilient environment using mulches, encouragement of beneficial creatures, water-wise irrigation and, most importantly, our meticulous and thoughtful team.

On cold days in March, the garden is often affected by strong, chilly winds coming over the hills to the north or along the Severn Estuary from the southwest. The unexpected cold wind, just as the plants are beginning to grow, can be devastating and many are lost or knocked back in progress, particularly the evergreens. As it sits on top of a limestone plateau, the garden is quite exposed, but the plants benefit from a woodland windbreak and well-placed hedges, walls and structures that help to buffer the full force of these strong and salt-laden winds.

We benefit, however, from a slightly mild climate that offers opportunity for some tender plants, and we are experimenting with plants such as *Podranea ricasoliana*, *Erythrina crista-galli*, *Dregea sinensis* and a range from Mediterranean climate zones, but it is the combination of wet and cold that we fear the most with some of our new introductions.

The team and I are busy with many tasks as the season progresses, from big, ongoing projects such as tree planting to smaller aesthetic tasks such as deadheading the faded blooms of daffodils, hellebores and tulips in the pot displays and tidying yellowing allium leaves in the borders.

Turn the page to discover Tim's top spring tasks ▷



In spring, a magnificent old *Magnolia* x *soulangeana* puts on a great show over the Bowling Lawn.

A *Prunus* 'Tai-haku' on the Cherry Tree Lawn is surrounded by yew domes and a selection of daffodils including *Narcissus* 'Mount Hood', *N.* 'Pueblo', *N.* 'Thalia' and *N.* 'Elka'.

Staking border perennials

In the borders, we use hazel peasticks to support our herbaceous perennials. The sharpened ends are inserted into the ground, before the tips are woven into cage-like and fence-like structures. They look attractive in their own right until the plants grow through them and they disappear from view.

A selection of good sharp tools is required – secateurs, loppers and a pruning saw – and don't be afraid to use a lump hammer to tap some of the vertical peasticks into the ground if you are struggling and need a bit of extra power.

Begin by choosing a well-branched peastick with strong horizontals. Cut the base with a slanted cut and push it deep into the ground – a pin such as a pigtail spike can help to make the initial hole. Insert these peasticks one by one around your herbaceous plant or drift, and twine the stems together with the neighbouring peastick horizontally until they are secure. Then bend the tips over and twine together to form your plant-support cage.

We try to create a cross-hatch effect at the top of the support with wider hatching for larger foliage and flowers and tighter, more intricate hatching for smaller plants such as *Nepeta* that are prone to flopping, especially at the front of the border.

The taller structures often become more 'fence-like' in their nature, and we then fortify the horizontals with some of the 'not-so-branched' material that you invariably find with a bundle of peasticks. This is done by weaving the straighter stems into the sides horizontally to form a tough barrier, which acts to encourage the herbaceous plant to grow up and out of the structure vertically.

We use material coppiced on-site and some supplied by a local woodsman in the Forest of Dean, and we like to use it quickly, while the sticks are flexible – older peasticks tend to become brittle and snappy even after being stored in a cool area and covered with a tarpaulin.

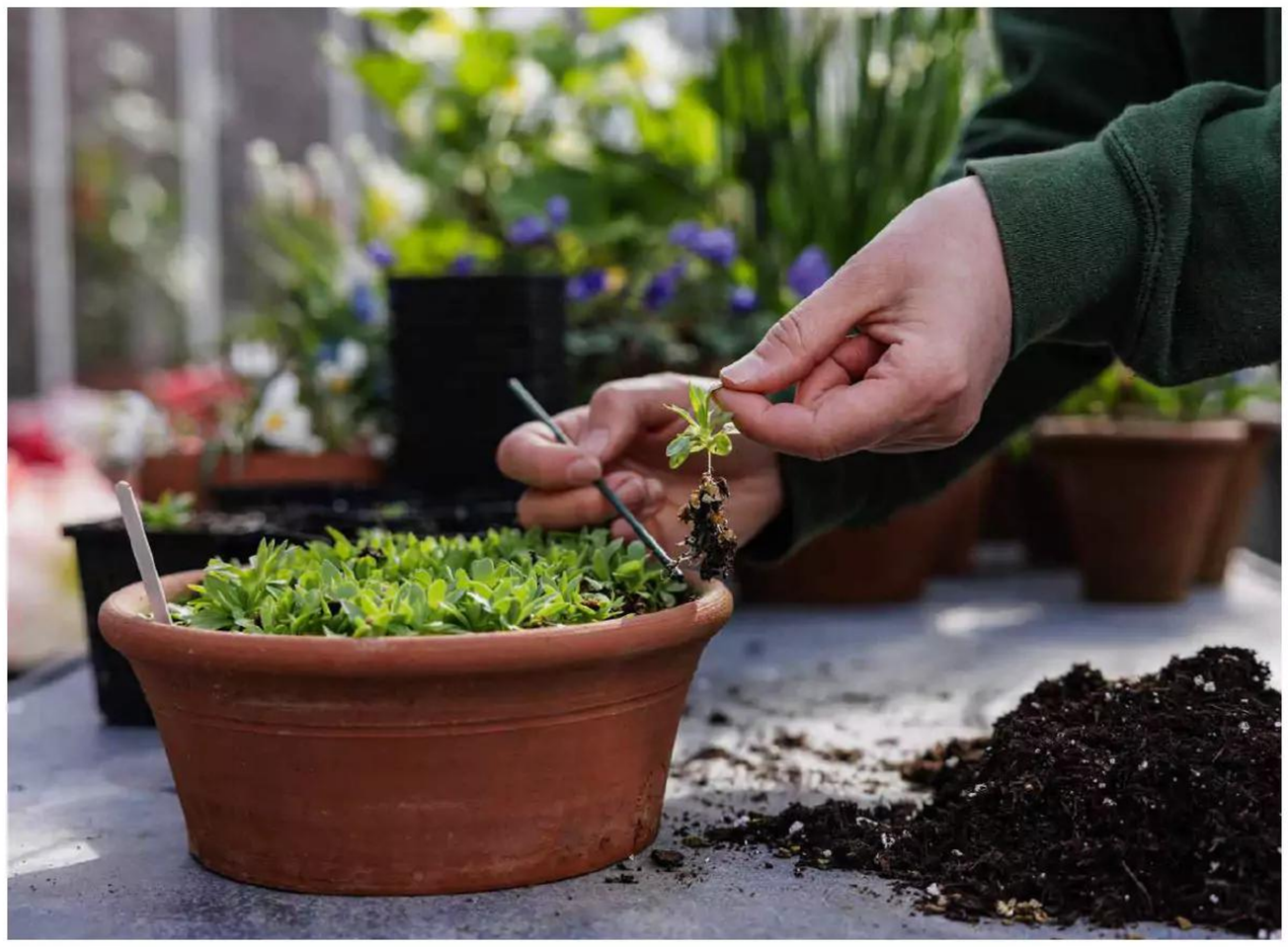
We always prepare for staking by looking at the general growth habit of individual plants and, in particular, the flowering height. I aim for the top of the hazel structure to be just below the foliage height, so it seems like there is no supporting structure at all.

This is the time we also build hazel wigwams, fences and supports for climbing vegetables and sweet peas.

Pricking out seedlings

It's the time of year when propagation is to the fore. I like to run our nursery areas like a mini factory, the sole purpose of which is to produce plants for the garden. Space is at a premium at this time of year, so we prick out and grow on the hardier seedlings such as *Helichrysum* and *Atocion* (see right). Some of these are from autumn sowings growing on in the cold frames, and some are from sowings in January.

With a long list of half-hardy and tender plants yet to be sown, it's important to hurry these plants down the production line and into the garden to make space for the rest. We usually gently prick out these seedlings directly into 9cm pots, let them settle for a week or two while they establish, and begin to harden them off via the cold frames for planting in April or May. We generally sow more than we need to allow for germination issues.





Growing waterlilies

We keep a few of our waterlilies in pots to provide them with a soil substrate in which to grow. It's important to re-pot them every few years to encourage healthy growth and flowering. This is best done in spring as water temperature and daylight increase.

The simplest way to do this is to lift the whole pot out of the water, extract the tuber, then cut out any old material. Repot the tuber back into the centre of the pot using an aquatic or clay-heavy soil, which you can then cover with a gravel mulch.

It's important to lower the pot gently into the water, so water fills the pot slowly; plunge it back too fast, and everything will float away, and you'll spend days with a soil-filled, cloudy pool.

While replanting I take the opportunity to insert some home-made feed bombs into the soil so that nutrients are ready and waiting when the waterlilies' roots begin to grow. These feed balls, which are quite fun to make, are a mix of slow-release fertiliser and clay soil, which is wetted and rolled into a ball, and allowed to dry under a bench in the glasshouse. Push them into the root zone of the pot at any time during the growing season.

Dividing narcissi

Dividing daffodils is a great way to increase your stock and the speed of naturalising lawns. This is especially useful when the clumps become too dense with underground bulb material and go 'blind' – stop flowering. We do this under the trees in the Orchard, where *Narcissus* 'W.P. Milner' is multiplying with our help every year.

Wait until they have finished flowering, then dig up and lift larger clumps with a spade. Gently tease the bulbs apart and replant 'in the green'. With bulbs in the green, I often find it is easier to slit the turf with a spade (see right), so you don't damage the daffodil's foliage, which is essential for the bulb to gather energy before the leaves die off in summer.

If replanting in groups, try to space the bulbs around 5cm apart, and plant five to seven bulbs in each group.



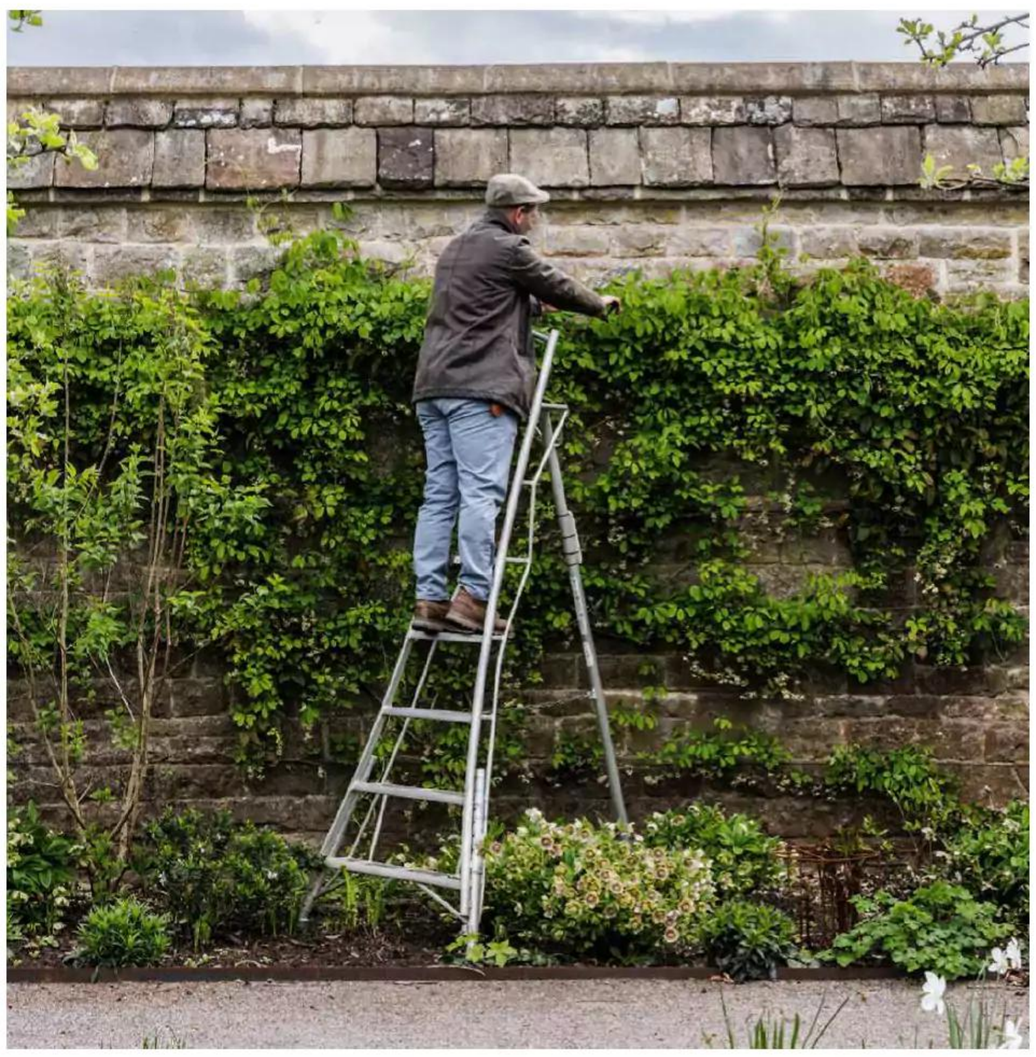
Pruning climbers and shrubs

Akebia quinata 'Shirobana' (below) is a spring-flowering climber that puts on a lot of growth, so we prune it four to five times a year. We retain the woody framework behind the semi-evergreen foliage and rarely have to worry about pruning the main stems. They start growing early and vigorously, so it's important to cut back any fresh extension growths at this time of year to expose the fragrant flowers (below right) and prevent it from romping out of control.

We tie in the strong new growths of our climbing roses now, and any clematis that have been hard-pruned to allow them to grow up their supports. It's also a good time to tidy up the wall-trained *Garrya elliptica* on the Western Walkway, which has just finished flowering. I tie loose extension growth into gaps (right) and gently tip back longer stems to help fill the wall between branches. This ensures a constant recycling of productive wood and encourages bushier growth further down the stems.

It is the same with many of the evergreen shrubs we use to clothe the walls, such as the *Magnolia grandiflora* in the Pergola Garden, which I'm training to create a square around an ornamental lantern. I usually do this when the worst of the frosts are behind us, because young evergreen growth can be very susceptible to late frosts.







OTHER EARLY SPRING TASKS

• **Protect crops** Our issues here include rabbits, pigeons and frost, so in the cut-flower beds, we use fleece, netting and cloches.

• **Feed** We regularly feed with Maxicrop, seaweed feeds, plant-health stimulants and potassium-based tonics, starting in March.

• **Direct sow vegetables** We sow radish, carrots, kohlrabi, rocket and lettuce directly in the soil now in succession to ensure a long harvest period.

• **Plant sweet peas** We sow most of our sweet peas in autumn and overwinter in coldframes so we can plant really early in the season.

• **Pot up dahlias** We take these out of storage and pot up into the polytunnel, ready for planting after the final frosts.

• **Virus watch** Look out for tulip fire as the flowers emerge in April, and remove anything affected as soon as possible.

• **Plant summer bulbs** Pot up or plant lilies, nerines, *Amaryllis belladonna* and *Eucomis*.

• **Prune penstemon** We give these plants a final hard prune in April after the last frosts.

• **Take cuttings** Spring cuttings from our stock plants of salvias and pelargoniums root quickly and produce garden-ready plants in their first year.

• **Mulch** This is key for our beds and borders. Each year we are using more of our own homemade compost. Every area is mulched at least once before the end of spring.

• **Plant foxgloves** We overwinter young plants in three- to five-litre pots in a space where we can easily fleece them during cold snaps, and plant out in-situ during March or April.



Preventative pest management

We like to stay ahead of the game when it comes to problems. To control unwanted guests, we have created a tabulated list of all our known pests and diseases, including what time of year they are likely to arrive and how to control them. This helps to stop them from getting established.

The dreaded box moth is one of our main concerns. We have been caught out before with overwintering eggs on previously clean plants. These hatch in March and April, and then the caterpillars start to nibble their way through the box almost unnoticed.

Aside from keen eyes to spot them and the webbing they produce, the simplest method of damage prevention is to put pheromone traps around the vicinity of the plants now, which will quickly lure in any moths and notify us of their presence.

At this time of year we also begin introducing beneficial insects into the glasshouse to combat a wide range of pests that can appear early, such as slugs, sciarid flies and aphids, using nematodes, predatory mites and parasitic wasps. A clean glasshouse and growing environment is key to a successful nursery.

In the garden, we look out for snail and slug damage while keeping a watchful eye for the return of lily beetles, which we will hand-pick from the lilies and cardiocrinums.

When the weather warms up enough, we introduce a few ladybird larvae into the Pergola Garden to help build the population of this aphid-busting ally.

Scan the QR code above to watch our video of how Tim tackles box moth. Or head to gardensillustrated.com/boxmoth

Spring lawn care

As the garden wakes up, the grass is often the first thing to get going. At Mounton, we have several grades of grass, from fine turf on the Croquet Lawn through to bulb-filled meadow grass in the Orchard. In spring, we put some groundwork into the fine lawns to ensure the grass and environment is resilient and has the best opportunity to thrive and produce luxurious turf. We are conscious of the need to be sustainable and work to a philosophy that manages these areas in a responsible and effective way. Spring maintenance is where we begin, with scarifying or de-thatching (see right), spiking, top-dressing and over-seeding. We use a range of seaweed and organic-based feeds and tonics and our aim is to produce a resilient lawn capable of withstanding a hot summer, while watering responsibly.

We spray regularly with a manganese feed. The soil here is alkaline, and manganese, a very important micronutrient, is unavailable at high pH levels. This had led to a yellowing of the lawns, which we diagnosed by testing the soil. The application of manganese has had a dramatic effect on the all-round health of the lawns and it is a reminder to make sure you test the soil before attempting any solution – it's good to know what you are working with, be it in beds, borders or lawns. Healthy feeding and cultural remedies should be the starting point to any plant problem.

The lawn maintenance continues on throughout the year and can be a time-consuming and ever-evolving task, but a good start in the spring goes a long way to reducing effort required later. □

Scan the QR code to watch our step-by-step video of how Tim renovates a patchy lawn. Or head to gardensillustrated.com/fix-lawn



GI Reader EVENT



The Southern Terrace.



Right Helena Gerrish giving a talk on the history of Mounton on the Croquet Lawn in the Tea House Garden.



The herbaceous borders.

An afternoon at Mounton

Experience the magical Edwardian garden in South Wales recently restored by Arne Maynard

Gardens Illustrated has arranged this exciting opportunity for readers to visit the private garden of **Mounton House** in Monmouthshire, an Edwardian jewel. It has been brought back to life in the past decade by its dedicated owners with designer **Arne Maynard** and its talented garden team, led by Tim Stretton. Discover spaces including the Rock Garden, Pergola Garden, Southern Terrace and Tea House Garden, as well as herbaceous borders and views over the Severn Estuary.

The event will begin with a talk on the history of the garden and its creator, Henry Avray Tipping – a contemporary and colleague of Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens – with garden historian and Tipping biographer Helena Gerrish. A **guided tour** of the garden will be followed by refreshments in the Courtyard, where guests can delight in the glasshouse, potting shed and cart shed with its tree growing through the roof. This garden is rarely open to visitors and then to only a few groups a year, and places are limited, so book now.

Gardens Illustrated reserves the right to change any element of any event due to circumstances beyond its reasonable control. The garden features steps, slopes, level changes and uneven ground and therefore is not suitable for those with accessibility and mobility needs. See full terms and conditions, available at **gardensillustrated.com/readereventmounton**

WEDNESDAY 3 JUNE 2026

EVENT DETAILS

Tickets: £70 per person, including drinks.

Programme

2pm Arrival with a glass of sparkling wine or non-alcoholic alternative on the Croquet Lawn
2.15pm Welcome talk
2.30pm Tour of the garden
4pm Refreshments
From 4.30pm Depart

HOW TO BOOK

Find out more about this exclusive event and book your tickets by scanning this QR code, or go to **gardensillustrated.com/readereventmounton**

JOHN CAMPBELL

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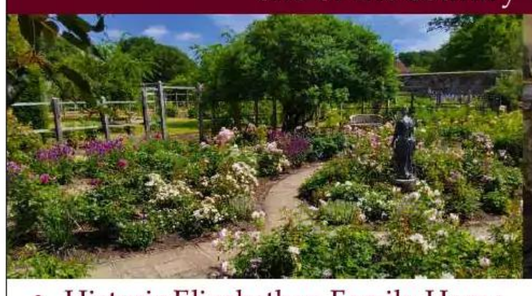
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SEEING THE LIGHT

Nigel Slater planted trees and climbers to clothe the bareness of his garden when he first moved in. Now the time has come to cut them back, and lift the gloom

ILLUSTRATION **LYNDON HAYES** PORTRAIT **JOHN CAMPBELL**

To hide my new garden's nakedness, I planted trees. Damson and mirabelle plum, 'Discovery' and reinette apples, two pears, a quince and a 'Nottingham' medlar. There was a purple-leaved filbert, a 'Chelsea' mulberry and a row of hornbeams. Over the next five years, every tree settled in, providing welcome shade, privacy and dappled light, and homes for nesting blackbirds. They framed the space, along with ivy and beech. It started to look like the garden had been there for 100 years.



The once-bare walls were now thick with glossy ivy and the existing *Robinia* – the only tree present when I moved in – was reaching for the sky. But underneath, all was not well. Plants were growing straggly, and flowers were few and far between. Strawberries failed to ripen and promising buds refused to open. The garden became a sanctuary for slugs and snails and other lovers of the dark. I blamed the soil, the weather and myself for planting perennials in the wrong place. I blamed climate change, bought-in compost and everything I could think of. Once bare and sun-baked, the garden was now so heavily shaded a visiting photographer once brought lights, in order to take a photograph… in the garden.

Part of the original attraction of this location was the row of horse chestnuts that hid the house from the road. They calmed traffic noise and prevented the passengers of the passing buses peering into my first-floor rooms. So the news that the magnificent tree opposite my house was causing subsidence to the terrace's cellars was a blow. Boreholes were dug, and the disturbance was monitored for a couple of years, before the final verdict was announced. Then, there were tears from both myself and upset locals for whom the trees were a much-loved part of the neighbourhood. Apparently, some cross words were exchanged on the neighbourhood forum. Once the death knell was announced, one woman came to hug the poor tree every day. Nevertheless, it had to go.

And I must admit, within 24 hours I went from mourning its removal to being grateful it was gone. ▷



The light had well and truly been let in... I felt as if I had a new garden. Then I got carried away

▷ Morning sun filled my bedroom, lamps no longer had to be switched on inside during the day, and the whole house had more energy. The light had well and truly been let in. There was a little more traffic noise, but not enough to worry about. Thankfully, there was still a darker side to the property, for whose calm and gentle light I remain grateful.

And so it followed that early last year, I decided to trim the dark ivy hedge that had formed a cloud-like barrier along my boundary walls and climbed into the surrounding trees. It was a monumental task, taking several days. Slowly, as stem after stem of ivy was sawn away – many as thick as my arm – light began to emerge in the garden in a way it hadn't for years. As much as I had relished its dense, bottle-green leaves, once it was removed, I felt as if I had a new garden. Then I got carried away. We removed a couple of cracked branches from my largest *Cornus kousa*, then lifted out a couple of the fruit trees that were no longer fruiting and whose growth was hampering others. Again, light streamed in.

It was when the hornbeams were trimmed that the garden really became a different space. We cut the height of the entire row down by about a third, slashed crossing branches and generally thinned them out. A job for professionals, by the way, as it was beyond the capabilities of this amateur gardener. Immediately, previously dry, dark patches where almost nothing would grow became serious opportunities. Viburnums and daphnes that had sat there vacant for years came into bloom. The honeysuckle blossomed, and a shy magnolia flowered its socks off.

For some time, this garden also contained an accident waiting to happen. The long limb of an established tree that towered over neighbouring gardens had become something of a hazard. I appreciated the mellow shade it provided, and the dancing shadows it left on the York stone, but deep down I knew its days were numbered. Each new storm that arrived (and I love that they now have names) sent the branches thrashing left and right. If the branch had broken, it could easily have taken my neighbour's balcony with it. A visiting tree surgeon, here to trim my hornbeams, broke the news. "There's a *very* dodgy branch on your *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia'. You'd best get rid of it." We applied for the council's blessing and the branch's removal was sanctioned. The day it came down (amid more tears) sunlight beamed into the darkest part of the garden, an area where nothing had previously survived. A year or two later, we have an acer, a crab apple and a Virginia creeper in this space, and all are in fine fettle.

Fortunately, for all the new light, there is still much shade in this garden, and as long as I am custodian, there always will be. It provides coolness and sanctuary on the sunniest of days, and a home for wild anemones and primroses, as well as hepaticas the colour of fondant creams, and towering stems of Solomon's seal. But the garden has balance. Now that the tears have dried, the new light here is more than welcome. And the house, the plants and their gardener are positively basking in it. □

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JASON INGRAM

SPRING BLOSSOM

Flowering trees and shrubs are one of the delights of spring and make wonderful additions to even the smallest of gardens

WORDS JACK ALDRIDGE

FACT FILE

What A selection of trees and shrubs that offer blossom in spring.

Season Depending on genus the trees featured here offer flowers from February to midsummer with most flowering in March and April.

Size Depending on species, from roughly 4m x 4m up to around 15m x 10m.

Conditions Most are happy in well-drained, reasonably moist, fertile soils in sun to part shade. The flowering dogwoods favour acid to neutral conditions.

Origins Depending on genus the trees featured are from temperate regions ranging from China (*Magnolia*) and Japan (*Prunus*) to Europe (*Malus*) and North America (*Cornus*).

Hardiness All options featured are hardy throughout the UK. RHS hardiness ratings vary but are between H4 and H6 and, depending on species, suitable for gardens in USDA zones 5a to 10b.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
†Hardiness ratings given where available.

***Cercis chinensis* 'Avondale'**
Bright-pink pea flowers emerge from purple buds, along every bare bit of stem. Glossy, green, heart-shaped leaves turn brilliant gold in autumn. Tolerant of heat and drought. Height and spread: 3m x 2.5m. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 6a-9b†.

***Prunus* 'The Bride'**
A favourite flowering cherry for a small garden, making a modest, shrubby tree smothered in masses of the purest white flowers, with reddish-pink centres. 4m x 4m. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 6a-8b.





***Prunus* Chocolate Ice (= 'Matsumae-fuki')**
One of the best of the Matsumae cultivars, bred in Japan. I love it for its profusion of large white flowers, set off brilliantly by the saturated red-bronze emerging leaves. 4m x 4m. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

***Malus brevipes* 'Wedding Bouquet'**
Large white flowers produced in profusion on a small, weeping tree. Reliably followed by an excellent display of small, bright-red fruits, which last on the tree well into winter. 4m x 4m. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

The appearance of the first spring blossom is a much-anticipated seasonal landmark, capturing all the excitement and promise of this wonderful time of year. There is an overwhelming selection of spring-flowering trees and shrubs available, in a variety of shapes and forms, with flowers in a range of colours, meaning that at least one can be found to suit gardens of every size or style. Many are hard-working plants offering structure, shade and shelter, and often more than one season of interest: always an important consideration when gardening with limited space. Spring blossom should also not be overlooked as an early source of nectar for pollinators.

While it's impossible to discuss all of them, I have managed to choose some of my favourites, which are represented in most large public gardens or arboreta, as well as specialist nurseries.

As the 'poster child' of the spring blossom season, flowering cherries are quite understandably one of the most popular ornamental trees sold in the UK. Tough, easy-going and spectacular in a range of conditions, they vary from broad, spreading cultivars, such as *Prunus* 'Shirotae', to upright, fastigiate forms such as *P.* 'Amanogawa', ideal for confined spaces. *P.* 'The Bride' would be suitable for growing in the smallest garden and a large container. The Matsumae cultivars bred by Masatoshi Asari in Hokkaido also come highly recommended, all performing exceptionally well in the UK.

Prunus is in the family Rosaceae, which includes several other spring-flowering favourites. Amelanchiers are widely planted for their multi-season interest, combining snowy-white flowers with contrasting coppery-red emerging foliage and, later, vivid orange autumn colour. Many ornamental hawthorns (*Crataegus*) and flowering crab apples (*Malus*) are as welcome for their blossom as their abundant, decorative fruit. Like their edible counterparts, the latter can also be manipulated by pruning into various trained forms; an espaliered ornamental crab against a fence or wall is a wonderful sight in flower and works well where space is limited.

Magnolias are the undeniable aristocrats of the spring garden, from the goblets of *Magnolia* x *soulangeana* to the magnificent Asiatic types such as *M. campbellii*. Again, there is a proliferation of named cultivars to choose from, which, thanks to modern breeding, especially in New Zealand, now include many free-flowering, more weather-proof cultivars in sumptuous rich colours. *Magnolia* Felix Jury (= 'Jurmag2'), *M.* 'Ruth' and *M.* 'Purple Sensation' are among the best of these.

The yellow magnolias, such as *M.* 'Lois', also offer a welcome change ▷

To continue turn to page 51

The poster child of spring, flowering cherries are one of the most popular ornamental trees

FIONA LEA, ROB WHITWORTH AND TREVOR SIMS / ALL GAP PHOTOS

***Paulownia fortunei* Fast Blue (= 'Minfast')**
An astonishingly fast-growing tree, with a dome-shaped crown and large foxglove-like fragrant flowers. A spectacular choice. 15m x 10m. AGM. RHS H5.





***Malus* 'Princeton Cardinal'**
Probably the best of the dark-leaved crab apples. Its purple leaves pair well with the intense red-pink flowers. These are followed by small purple fruits. 4m x 3m. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

***Magnolia* 'Purple Sensation'**
One of several hybrids from New Zealand that combine the richness of colour of *M. campbellii* and the toughness and later flowering of *M. lilliflora*. 8m x 8m. RHS H4, USDA 5a-8b.

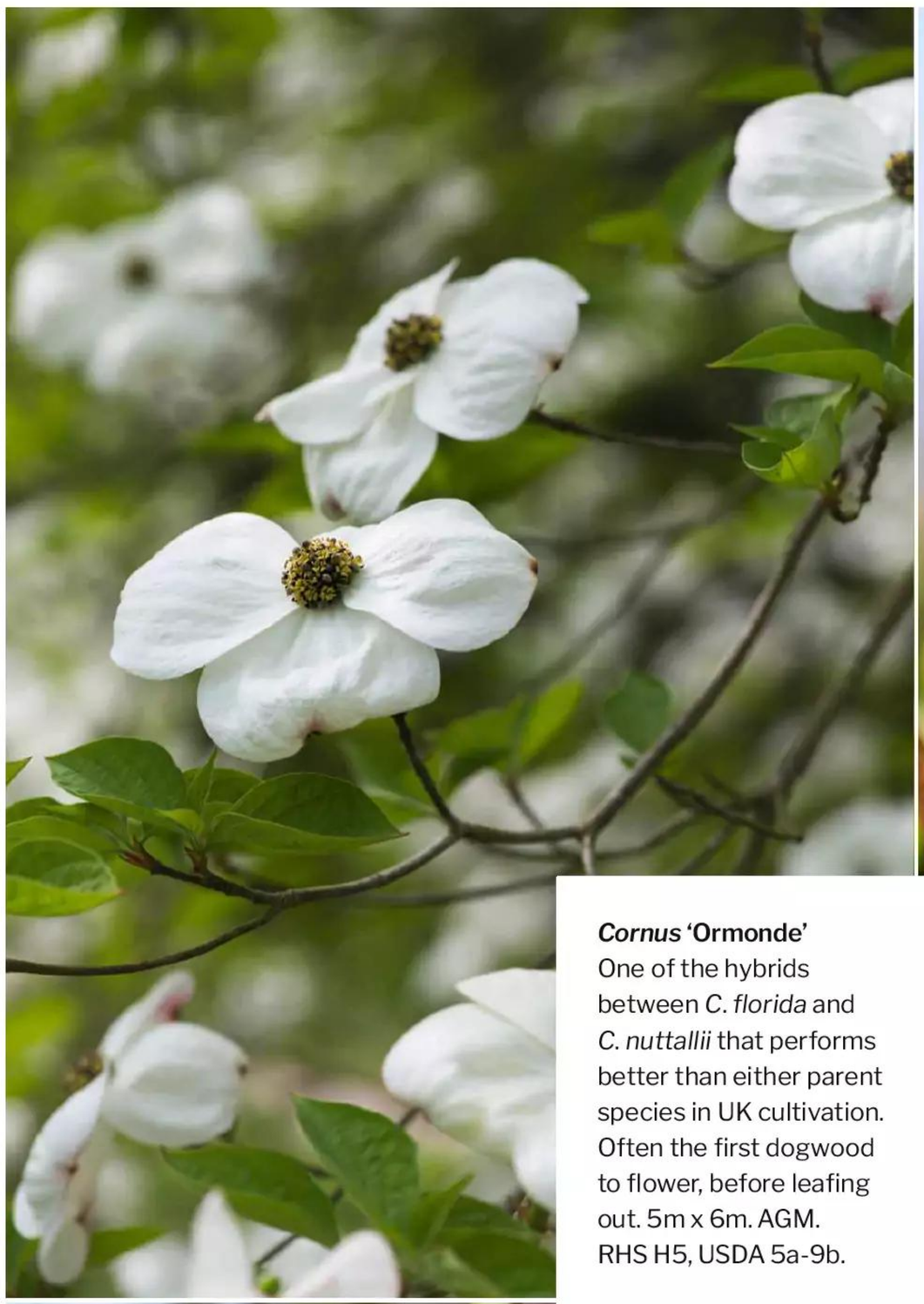


Staphylea holocarpa* var. *rosea
Drooping panicles of soft-pink flowers fill the canopy like clusters of pink coral. Bronze-flushed pinnate leaves emerge after flowering. Good on alkaline soils. 5m x 3m. RHS H5.

***Prunus* 'Collingwood Ingram'**
A small, upright tree of neat habit, with the deepest red-pink flowers. Named for the man who is famous for introducing many Japanese flowering cherries to the UK. 6m x 4m. AGM. RHS H6.



BOZENA PIOTROWSKA, DAVID TULL AND JACQUI DRACUP / GAP PHOTOS; JACK ALDRIDGE; P TOMLINS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



***Cornus* 'Ormonde'**
One of the hybrids between *C. florida* and *C. nuttallii* that performs better than either parent species in UK cultivation. Often the first dogwood to flower, before leafing out. 5m x 6m. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 5a-9b.



***Magnolia* 'Lois'**
The most beautiful clear primrose-yellow flowers, borne over a long period in mid to late spring, meaning they will often avoid damage from spring frosts. 8m x 6m. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.



Corylopsis sinensis
A large, multi-stemmed shrub. Its horizontal branches are decorated with hundreds of sweetly scented inflorescences. Appreciates some shelter from surrounding trees. 4m x 4m. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 6a-8b.

***Halesia diptera* Magniflora Group**
An extremely beautiful and elegant thing, with flowers produced in great numbers along the branches before leafing out. Its weeping habit adds to its elegance. 9m x 9m. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



JOANNA KOSSAK AND SONIA HUNT / GAP PHOTOS; DEBORAH VERNON, P TOMLINS, JOHN RICHMOND AND THRILLERFILLERSPILLER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO.





***Magnolia* 'David Clulow'**
The best white-flowered cultivar. Large, pristine-white, cup-and-saucer-shaped flowers, on a medium-sized tree. A Gresham hybrid raised in the USA, it is more weatherproof than some. 6m x 6m. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 6a-8b.

***Azara serrata* 'Andes Gold'**
Its mass of intense, mustard-yellow flowers make this an untypical choice for spring blossom. An attractive evergreen tree, with interesting foliage. Flowers best in a sunny position. 4m x 3m. RHS H4, USDA 8a-10b.

▷ and have the advantage of flowering late enough in spring to avoid disastrous late frosts. Buying a grafted magnolia will ensure flowering from an early age.

There are many easily overlooked genera that are every bit as special as the beloved stalwarts. *Staphylea*, the unfortunately named bladdernuts, are a real favourite of mine. Perhaps the best of the lot is *S. holocarpa* var. *rosea*, a splendid alternative to a flowering cherry, covered in pink coral-like flowers in April.

The family Styracaceae also contains some beautiful and elegant flowering trees. A relative newcomer to gardens is *Melliodendron xylocarpum*, only introduced to cultivation from China as recently as the 1990s. It is an exquisite thing, with hundreds of pale-pink, star-shaped flowers clustered along the lengths of the bare, pendent branches; everyone who sees it is cast under its spell. It is being propagated in small numbers and sometimes available from specialist nurseries, so something to keep a keen eye out for. The snowdrop trees (*Halesia*), from the east coast of North America, are related and equally elegant, flowering in late spring.

Perhaps the closest thing to *Jacaranda* we can grow outside in the UK are the foxglove trees (*Paulownia*). Only feasible in the largest garden or a landscape setting, they can grow very rapidly into a spectacular specimen tree. The *Paulownia fortunei* Fast Blue (= 'Minfast') at RHS Garden Wisley has done exactly that and has flowered heavily from a relatively young age.

Where a big tree would not be suitable, a large shrub, such as *Cercis chinensis*, makes a good alternative

Where such a big tree would not be suitable, a large shrub, such as *Cercis chinensis*, makes a good alternative. *Corylopsis* are among the very finest and are some of my absolute favourites. They appreciate some shelter – but will reward this with the most wonderful display of acidic, sherbet-yellow flowers. Being multi-stemmed, they also allow for light pruning to raise their canopy, allowing for underplanting; a contrasting pool of blue *Scilla siberica* planted beneath would make a terrific pairing. □

Jack Aldridge is a horticultural team leader at RHS Garden Wisley and an RHS Woody Expert Group member.

Where to see and buy

- **Bluebell Arboretum & Nursery** Annwell Lane, Smisby, Ashby de la Zouch, Derbyshire LE65 2TA. Tel 01530 413700, bluebellnursery.com
- **Burncoose Nurseries** Gwennap, Redruth, Cornwall TR16 6BJ. Tel 01209 860316, burncoose.co.uk
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The former vegetable farmer from California now works alongside Jonny Bruce at The Field Nursery

PORTRAIT **JASON INGRAM**

Favourite garden The 'Ditch' at Dan Pearson and Huw Morgan's Hillside garden captured me from my first visit. It's the perfect encapsulation of embracing weeds, while still steering land to be biodiverse and bountiful. Also, the grasses at Le Jardin Plume in France, where a sharply cut path only accentuates the wildness. And I'd be remiss to not mention Great Dixter, where the flamboyant borders and rich meadows are only outdone by the community.

Most valuable training I've always learned on the job, but when I first moved to the UK I started working in the Great Dixter Nursery where the atmosphere is all study. I learned so much every day and am so thankful for that time. Among many lessons, the nursery manager Michael Morphy taught me to look at propagation through the lens of how plants reproduce in the wild.

Dream plant destination Seeing plants growing in their natural environments, within a landscape, is so important. I've travelled with a group to the Balkans to study ecology and drought resistance, and we plan to go back this spring. I also dream of seeing hay meadows in Romania.

Favourite planting style I like when gardens are more about editing than design – self-seeded, loose, native and messy. At the same time, I do want to see the hand of the gardener in the garden, tending. Highly regarded 'wild' spaces often have thoughtful human presence.

Favourite 'weed' Most of my favourite plants are weedy. I love plants that grow wildly and abundantly.

Biggest challenge facing gardeners today Witnessing the climate crisis first hand takes a heavy toll on our mental health and is our biggest collective challenge. When you love plants and green spaces it can be hard to not be disheartened.

One easy way to be more sustainable Be messy, make piles, be a bit rough and then, when the time comes, be okay with a strong intervention. I still struggle with the last part – but diversity is dependent on disruption.

My guiding principles I think having a real reverence and respect for plants is foundational to good gardening. We need to act in partnership with the plants and ecology and not assert dominance over our plots.

Career goals I'd love to be growing plants for restoration projects. There are ways for us to put humans into rewilding efforts and I could see wild-seed collecting and then returning plants back to the landscape. That and going back to my roots and growing vegetables again.

Instagram @daniel.james.co



WITH THANKS TO THE FIELD NURSERY IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE WHERE THIS PORTRAIT WAS TAKEN

Having a real reverence and respect for plants is foundational to good gardening. We need to act in partnership with plants

IN BRIEF

What Country garden with large terrace, lawn with long borders, pool area, gravel garden, small orchard, lilac and wildflower meadow walks, a pond and a tree house.
Where East Sussex.
Size Approximately five acres gardened.
Soil Quite sandy and free-draining in most areas, neutral to mild acid, with some clay.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 8.

The expansive, award-winning design relies on symmetry, lining up the garden's axes with the doors out from the main rooms of the house. Many new trees were added, along with a wide range of nectar-rich perennials.

Grand design

In this large new country garden, designer Butter Wakefield has blended strong structure with playful planting

WORDS PAULA McWATERS PHOTOGRAPHS ALISTER THORPE



I always concentrate on adding as much scent as I can. It's good for us and for pollinators

Butter Wakefield has spread her wings. Renowned for her beautifully detailed city gardens, she now has a five-acre, award-winning design in her portfolio. "I love our London gardens, but being able to stretch out on this one was a real treat," she says. "It's a huge project and at times it was all I could think about, but it has been so rewarding."

While their house in East Sussex was being extended and completely remodelled (by architects DKN Jamm and interior designer Rebecca Wakefield – no relation), the owners engaged Butter to simultaneously reconfigure the garden. As their confidence grew, the clients added more areas for Butter's attention, asking for a series of plant-rich sections inspired by nearby Gravetye Manor, and arranged like rooms, where they could relax and entertain guests.

Starting behind the house, there is ample space to play host, spilling out from the drawing room, dining room and kitchen onto a generous terrace with four-season interest in parterre-style beds. "The rear elevation is quite symmetrical, so we took our cue from that," explains Butter. "And, as it is south facing, we provided shade and vertical interest with a pair of multi-stemmed *Parrotia persica* trees." Clipped yew domes help create a structural winter scene, with tulips and narcissi in spring giving way to a tangle of effusive, immersive planting in summer, including *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', *Salvia* 'Blue Spire', *Geranium* 'Azure Rush' and geums *G.* 'Prinses Juliana' and *G.* 'Totally Tangerine'.

Throughout the project, all of Butter's plant choices have been aimed at increasing biodiversity. "I always concentrate on adding as much scent as I can," she says. "It's good for us and it's good for pollinators. So I have gone to town on that here, which is something my client appreciates and understands."

Beyond the terrace is an expansive lawn with wide flower borders either side, backed by beech hedging and leading to a substantial pergola, which Butter has had rebuilt in oak, improving its proportions by increasing its height. Hydrangeas proliferate here, along with wisteria, climbing roses and late-flowering anemones.

The dividing lines between the various different areas of the garden have been carefully considered. Butter chooses an appropriate backdrop for each individual space, such as walling or hedging, then incorporates what she calls "purposeful, good access" with a choice of routes to take, and ▷

To continue reading, turn to page 60

Above The lawned upper terrace – one of two – has been enlivened with the addition of young *Malus* 'Evereste' crab apple trees, underplanted with blue *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *suksdorfii* Caerulea Group and *C.* 'Blue Candle', and pink *Silene flos-cuculi*. Large terracotta pithos-style pots provide stylish eyecatchers.

Right, above The parterre beds on the terrace are dotted with yew forms and flanked by multi-stemmed *Parrotia persica* trees, which offer stunning autumn colour. Tulips here include *Tulipa* 'World Friendship', *T.* 'Dordogne' and *T.* 'Queen of Night'.

Right, below In summer, the parterre beds fill up with purple and blue-flowered perennials including *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', *Salvia* 'Blue Spire', *S. nemorosa* 'Caradonna' and *Scabiosa caucasica* 'Fama Deep Blue'.

Butter has created a distinctly Mediterranean feeling in this area. Galvanised steel water tanks reflect the sky

The gravel garden features galvanised steel tanks custom made by fabricator Hot Metal Engineering. In spring, shapely *Osmanthus* x *burkwoodii* shrubs provide structural height above zingy lime *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*, *Salvia rosmarinus* and low-growing *Pinus mugo*.



I love our London gardens, but being able to stretch out on this one was a real treat

▷ allows glimpses through to carry the eye from one part of the garden to the next. The pergola offers tempting views through to a small orchard, where Butter has added to the existing fruit trees with a couple of craggy old apple and pear trees and some new *Malus toringo* and *M.* 'Butterball'. Mown paths wind through this area, leading to a magical tree house, complete with zipline, and a sculptural log pile made from some of the trees that needed to be felled.

For Butter, one of the joys of this project was selecting and placing new trees and shrubs. For the gravel garden beyond the pool area, she was thrilled to find seven multi-stemmed *Osmanthus* x *burkwoodii* on a nursery visit to Deepdale Trees. "I almost fell off my perch, I was so excited. Their scale is perfect and their outline so beguiling, I knew they would add serious amounts of form, texture and interest to the space without overwhelming it. Also, their highly scented spring flowers offer great nectar for emerging bees."

Butter has succeeded in creating a distinctly Mediterranean feeling in this area with buff-coloured gravel and a series of galvanised steel water tanks, which reflect the sky and act as anchor points among the planting. This includes evergreen *Pinus mugo*, perennials such as *Dianthus carthusianorum* and *Echinacea pallida,* and grasses *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Bronzeschleier' and *Calamagrostis* x *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'.

Steps lead from here to one of two existing upper terraces, which has now been much improved by the addition of a line of yew hedging to screen it, plus a collection of *Malus* 'Evereste' trees. At their feet, in the long grass, Butter has threaded *Narcissus poeticus* var. *recurvus* for spring, followed by denim-blue *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *suksdorfii* Caerulea Group and *C.* 'Blue Candle'. From here, you can skirt around the house, along a pathway lined with lilacs, to eventually reach the drive at the front with its striking collection of topiary forms.

Butter is full of praise, not only for her own team, including Kappy Hawkes and Laura Bujarrabal, but also for landscape contractors The Outdoor Room, especially James Sponder, who she says "had the patience of Job". She is effusive, too, about Birchwood Tree and Estate Management, who now lovingly maintain the garden. The client's "playful approach" is also greatly appreciated. "She would often say to us, 'That's a great idea, let's go for it', which is always lovely to hear." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Butter Wakefield's work at **butterwakefield.co.uk**

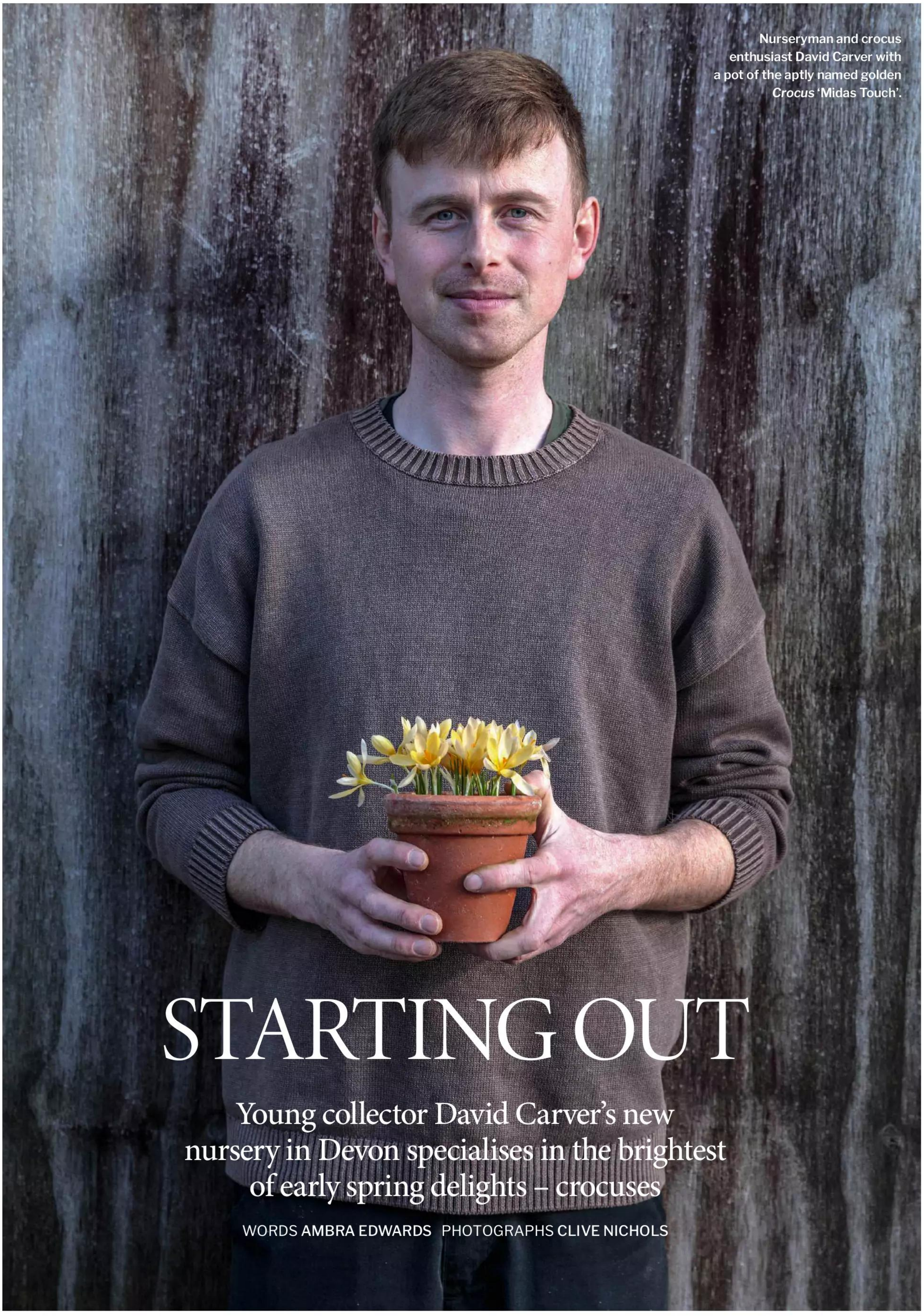
Above A patinated pine cone sculpture by Scottish-based artist James Parker, set within the pergola walk, acts as a focal point at the bottom of the lawn. Alliums, *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' and *Erigeron karvinskianus* soften the base.

Right, above The whimsical tree house, which was built by Blue Forest for the clients' three young children (but enjoyed by all the family), sits at the edge of a small orchard of fruit trees, where the grass has been allowed to grow long, with wildflowers pushing through.

Right, below Butter found these mature topiary shapes at a Belgian nursery. At the end of a long avenue of hornbeams, they create an impressive sense of arrival at the entrance to the garden, surrounded by long grass studded with ox-eye daisies.



Crocus veluchensis* x *C. cvijici
Crocus veluchensis, which grows on Mount Olympus in Greece, was crossed by Jānis Rukšāns with bright-orange *C. cvijicii* to produce this beautiful tawny-coloured and boldly striped hybrid.



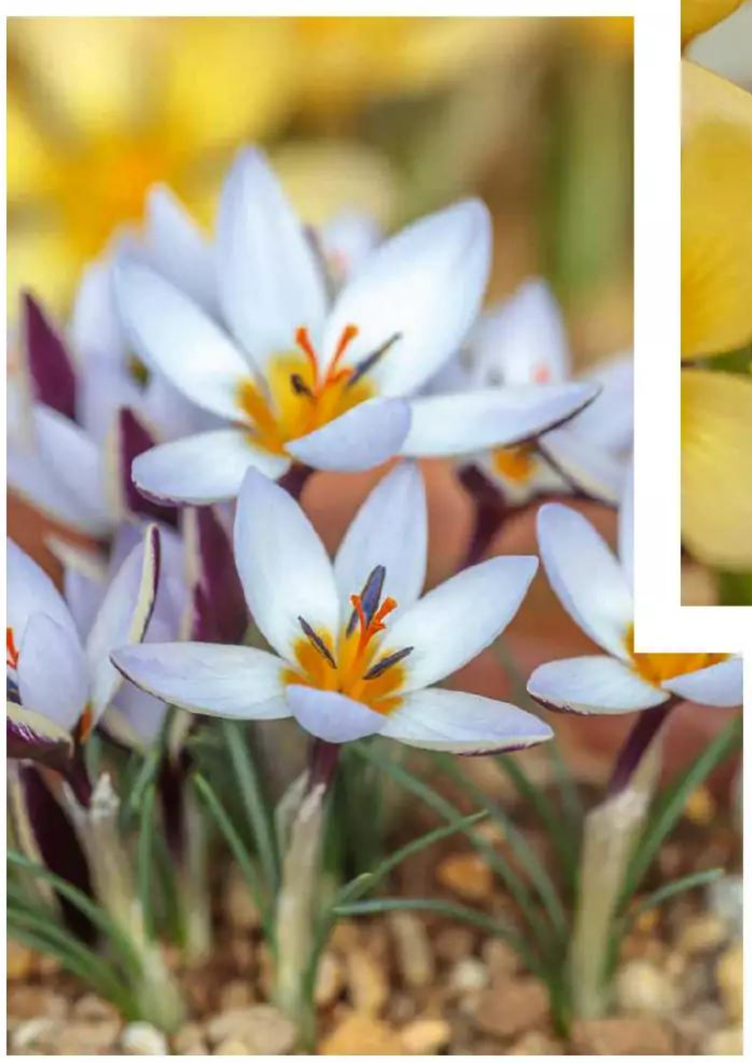
Nurseryman and crocus enthusiast David Carver with a pot of the aptly named golden *Crocus* 'Midas Touch'.

STARTING OUT

Young collector David Carver's new nursery in Devon specialises in the brightest of early spring delights – crocuses

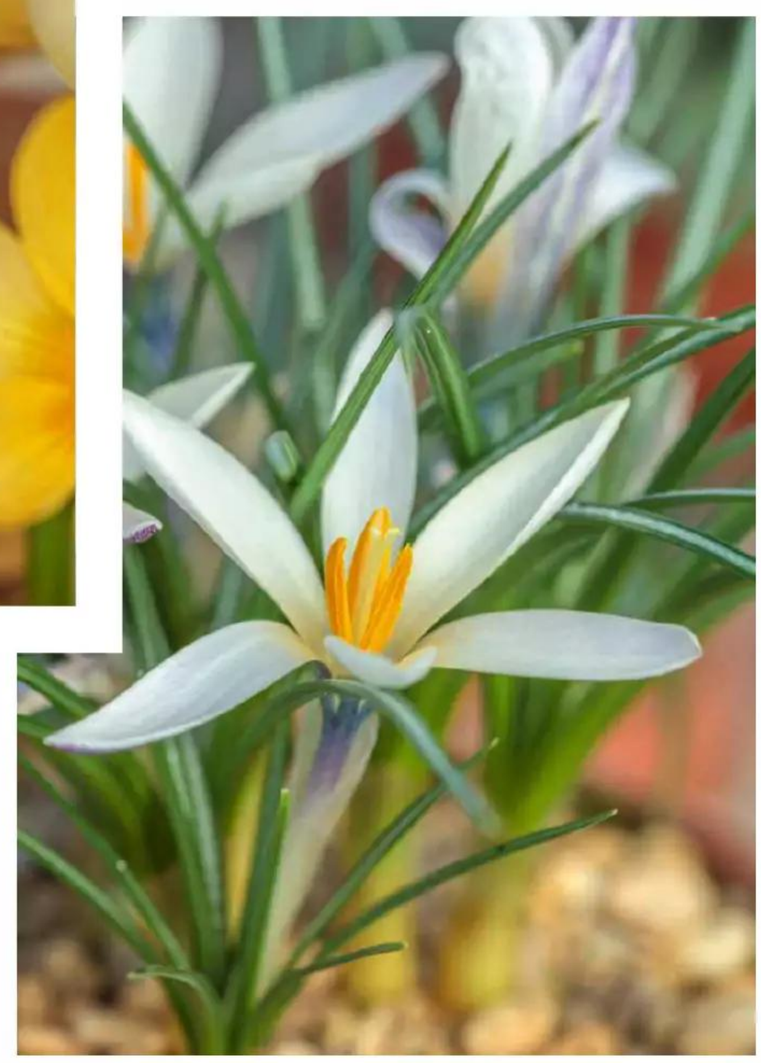
WORDS **AMBRA EDWARDS** PHOTOGRAPHS **CLIVE NICHOLS**

Crocus ionopharynx
This diminutive plant, only 2.5cm high, is David's favourite. Bright-blue stamens emerge from a poached-egg throat in small flowers with massive presence.





Crocus korolkowii
C. korolkowii generally has fragrant buff or yellow flowers, but Jānis Rukšāns discovered some albino forms on his travels, which perhaps may be parents to David's starry selection with its big yellow anthers and sky-blue throat.



***Crocus* 'Midas Touch'**
Like many crocuses, this handsome two-tone yellow hybrid, selected in 1994, increases much more rapidly in company. "You're pushing it with one bulb," explains David. "Two is a doable starting point, but get a few and they increase a lot faster. They are herd animals."

For me, it's all about bright colour at a time of year when there is none, and the beauty of the individual flowers

Nothing is quite so cheering after a long dull winter as the vivid floods of crocuses that wash over our parks and gardens in February and March. For David Carver, however, who has set up a small specialist nursery in Buckland Monachorum in Devon, it is not these massed displays that make his heart sing, but the exquisite, infinitely Instagrammable perfection of a single bloom (or ideally a small pot of blooms) of a rare species crocus.

Crocuses are native to a vast area and vary hugely in their cultural requirements. David is not entirely sure how many species there are. Perhaps 80? Perhaps 100? It depends which authority you rely on. The taxonomy of the genus crocus is fiendishly complicated, and new species are being discovered all the time. For example, beautiful *Crocus pilousii* from the slopes of Mount Parnassus was published only in 2023, while several in David's own collection are also relatively new to science.

They include *C. mediotauricus*, with its bold colour and blazing orange stigma, which dates from 2013, while *C. ruksansii*, from the Greek island of Karpathos, was published in 2017. The latter is named after Jānis Rukšāns, the crocus collector whom David most reveres, and who is generally considered the world authority on the genus. Last year, Rukšāns went exploring in Iran, North Macedonia, Albania and Greece, returning with no fewer than 143 new samples. At home in Latvia, he hand-pollinates his crocuses and sows the seed, occasionally giving rise to some exciting new crosses. When he has amassed sufficient stock, he sells some on.

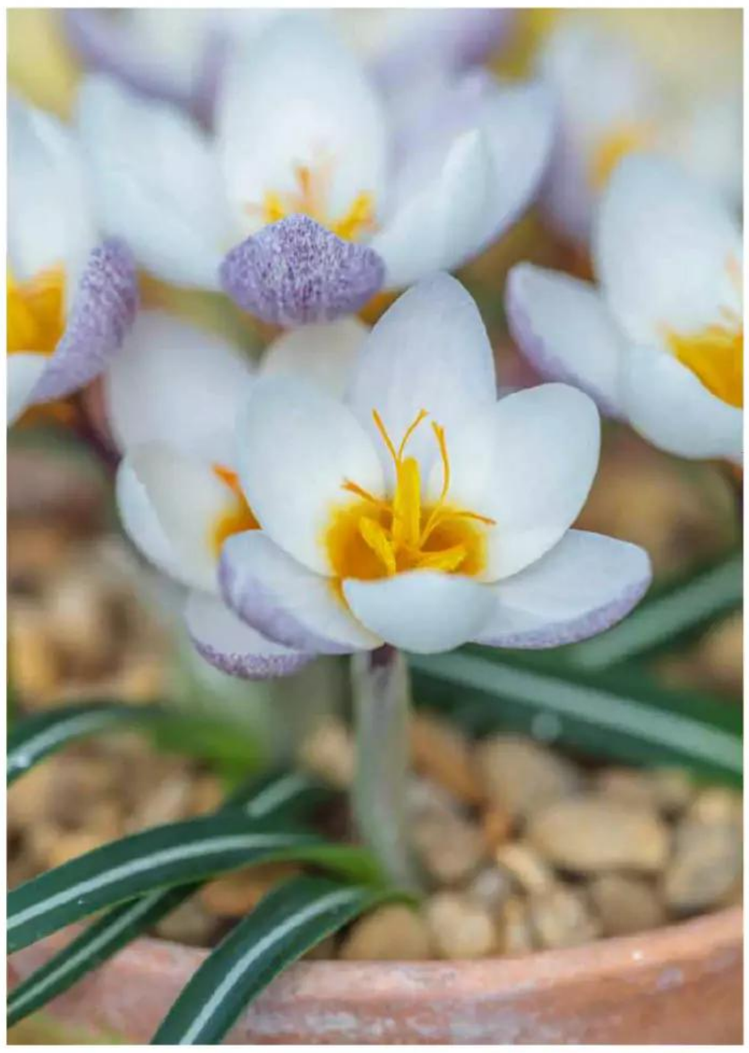
But Rukšāns is now in his 80th year, and has just announced that this year's list will be his last. It is up to younger enthusiasts to carry the torch for the genus. As a result, David has nigh-on bankrupted himself trying to buy up as much as he can of this precious stock, as he has for the past three years. (Rukšāns has published a different list each time.)

And David is doing much the same in the UK. As an active member of the Alpine Garden Society, whose stalwarts are ▷

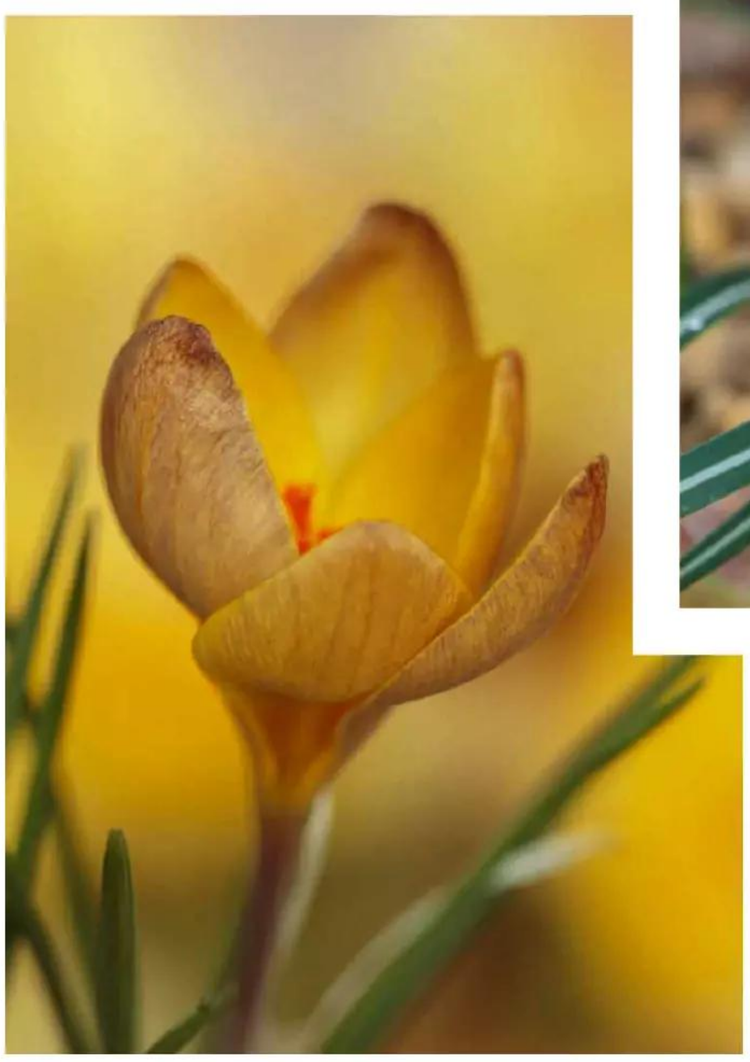
Crocus ruksansii
Growing primarily in the subtropical biome, this species was first published by Dimitri Zubov in 2017. He named it after Jānis Rukšāns, the renowned Latvian botanist and breeder of crocuses.

Crocus cvijicii
One of only a few crocuses that need a little shade all year round and some moisture during the summer dormancy. The early 20th-century crocus enthusiast EA Bowles wrote of this plant (named after a Serbian professor of geography): 'I never discovered how this name should be pronounced, whether it is better to imitate a sneeze or, as a witty friend of mine put it, "to play it on the violin".'

Crocus* x *paulineae
This elegantly veined and subtly coloured crocus is a naturally occurring hybrid between *C. abantensis* x *C. ancyrensis* discovered in Turkey, and is proving a popular parent for refined bronze and buff forms. It has proved to be useful in selecting out varying shades of an already exciting colour.



Crocus michelsonii
At 12cm high, this star-flowered crocus, which is native to Iran and Turkmenistan, is taller than most other species – although the downside of that is that the blooms tend to flop over. David, however, perseveres with growing it for the beauty of the blue that shines through the flower.



***Crocus vitellinus* 'Paloma'**
David admires the distinctive broad stripy foliage of this cultivar, which makes a neat pot when the flower has faded. The species is native to southern Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, and the species name, which means 'egg yolk', refers to the bright yellow-orange of Lebanese forms.



I'm convinced there are other young people who are interested, and I'd like to make sure there is a nursery people can buy from

▷ also generally past their first flush of youth, David has made it his business to pick up as many plants – and growing tips – from more experienced growers as he can.

David is just 29, and at first, he concedes, it was difficult to get these experts to take such a young whippersnapper seriously. "It's a group of people who are incredible growers, but they'd be down on me like a tonne of bricks for an incorrect label or using an unclean pot. But now more of them have seen my results, they have been really generous in helping me, and I think they are secretly quite pleased to see a younger person taking an interest. To get the plants to increase and make a good show, I am trying to follow closely what other growers have done. Many of them have seen these species growing in the wild, and that can help enormously with providing the right conditions."

David started out with certain advantages in life. He grew up surrounded by polytunnels, where his father grew plants for the family garden centre and landscaping business. And home was slap bang next door to Wildside, the garden created by plantsman extraordinaire Keith Wiley, packed with an outstanding collection of rare bulbs. Just down the road was The Garden House, famed for its snowdrops. "Also the daffodils in this part of the world, and the flowers in the hedgerows. I think all the small things that have been a part of my life came together to feed what has become a passion."

Few teenagers want to follow in their father's footsteps, and David initially set his sights on a career in travel and tourism. "But when I went on trips and found myself enjoying the local flora and visiting botanic gardens, I realised that's where my interest really lay."

Returning home, he set to work to reclaim a pair of polytunnels, abandoned and overgrown with brambles since his father's retirement. It is all so super-neat now, it's hard to imagine the nursery is little more than a year old, but David knows he has a long way still to go.

"A nursery is very different from a garden centre. You know you're always going to have customers there. But you don't know if there will be a market for these very specialist plants. I'm convinced there are other young people out there who ▷

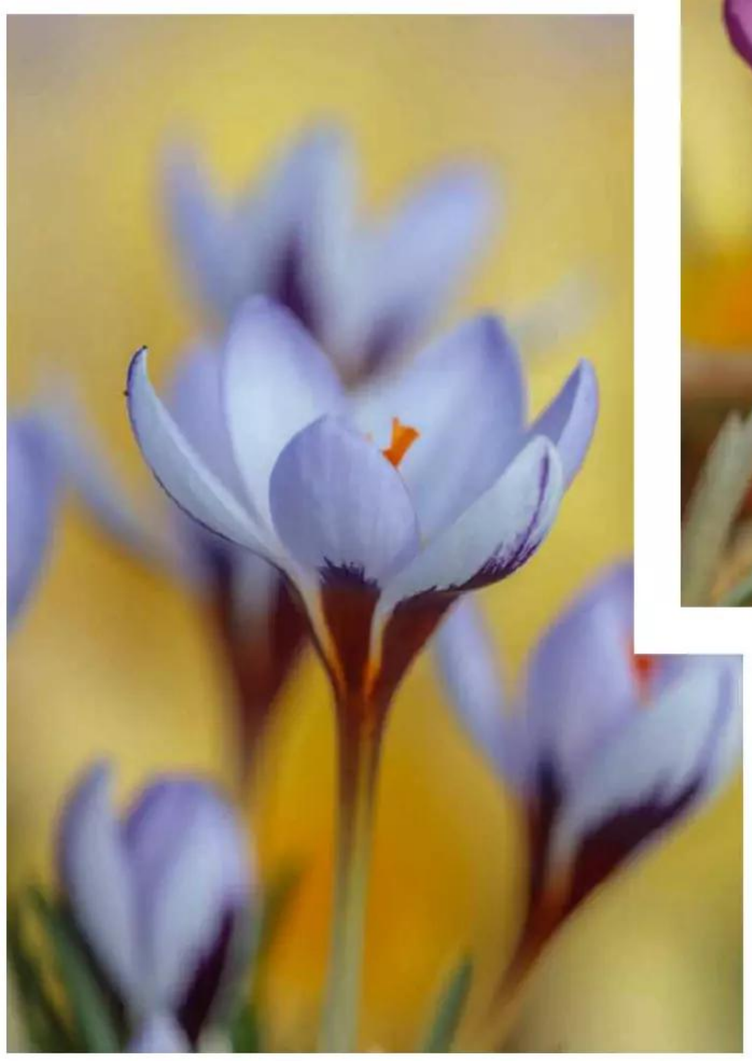
Most crocuses have a height and spread of between 7cm and 15cm. Most of those featured have a hardiness rating of RHS H3-H6, USDA 3a-8b.

Crocus cyprius
"A wonderful, tiny little thing that fills up a pot in no time," says David of this species that is endemic only to Cyprus. "This is going to be one of the smallest corms I handle when it comes to planting – it surprises me that something so small can still pack a marvellous flower."



Crocus isauricus
This crocus from the Gembos Yayla region of Turkey may belong to the recently described *Crocus concinnus*. The blue is consistent with the species, along with the strong feathering of the outer segments. For David, it is "a real gem" for being one of the larger-flowered species.





***Crocus tommasinianus* 'Leo'**
Named after the late Leo Baxendale, who found this as a seedling in his garden, it is a real stand-out flower, with outer segments that appear almost golden in sunlight. *Crocus tommasinianus* cultivars performs well in the open garden and look great accompanying snowdrops and other miniature bulbs in beds and borders.

I resign myself to sometimes losing plants that are rare and valuable. That's inevitable working with living things

▷ are interested – there's a lot of interest through social media – and I'd like to try to make sure there is a nursery out there that people can buy from, or before long there may not be anyone left offering these plants.

"I see myself as a last chance to keep some of these species in circulation. It's not just a business opportunity. With restrictions on collecting in the wild, it's important to keep bulbs circulating among collectors, or they will be lost. I have to resign myself to sometimes losing plants that are rare and valuable," David explains. "That's inevitable working with living things. But I learn from it, and if I lose a bulb but I know someone else has got it, not all is lost."

These are certainly not bulbs for everyone. Few, with the exception of vigorous *C. tommasinianus* 'Leo' and handsome tricolour *C. sieberi* 'Omalos', will prosper in the open garden. Rather, they must be grown under cover, displayed like a collection of rare gems in the 17th-century manner. The beauty of the flowers, David insists, should be appreciated close up, unspoiled by rain – especially true of his tiny favourites *C. cyprius* and *C. ionopharynx*. Plunging pots in a sand bed in an airy alpine house would be ideal, but a greenhouse will do.

"For me, it's all about bright colour at a time of year when there is none, and the beauty of the individual flowers. And don't forget there are autumn crocuses too. You can have months of enjoyment from changing displays, from as early as July right through the winter to March or April." □

USEFUL INFORMATION
Find out more about David's collection and his nursery, Buckland Cottage Gardens, at **bucklandcottagegarden.co.uk**

Further reading
David recommends two books by Jānis Rukšāns: *Crocuses: A Complete Guide to the Genus* (Timber Press, 2011) and *The World of Crocuses: The First Supplement* (The Latvian Academy of Sciences, 2023). The latter, a supplement to Rukšāns' 2017 monograph *The World of Crocuses*, is dedicated to the people of Ukraine, and 50 per cent of proceeds from its sale will go to support the Ukrainian army.

Crocus mediotauricus
A relatively recent species, which was published in 2013. Although at first glance you could mistake it easily for many of the other species with its intense purple flowers and the veining to the outers. Sometimes you need to wait to see the flower fully open to discover a rich egg-yolk-like centre and strong orange stigma.

Couples retreat

Designer Matthew Childs has transformed this typical suburban garden with a new modern design that enables the owners to workout, rest and play

WORDS ZIA ALLAWAY PHOTOGRAPHS ALISTER THORPE



IN BRIEF

What Multi-use town garden.
Where Surrey.
Size 18m x 14m.
Soil Slightly acidic clay loam.
Climate Temperate with low winter temperatures of -10°C.
Hardiness zone USDA 8b/9a.

In the space once occupied by a lawn, a bubbling water feature in a Medea pot from Torc Pots creates a focal point. Surrounding plants include *Iris* 'Quechee' and *I.* 'Tropic Night', *Geranium* Rozanne (= 'Gerwat'), *G.* 'Orion', *Salvia* 'Royal Bumble', *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* and alliums beneath the canopies of multi-stem *Rhus typhina*.

We threw out the rule book of what a suburban garden should look like



Above The timber boardwalk creates a circular path around the garden, linking the house to the dining area, firepit, hot tub and gym, which is from James Gray. Kentish ragstone boulders offer informal seating, and offcuts of the same stone disguise the reservoir and electric cable of the water feature.

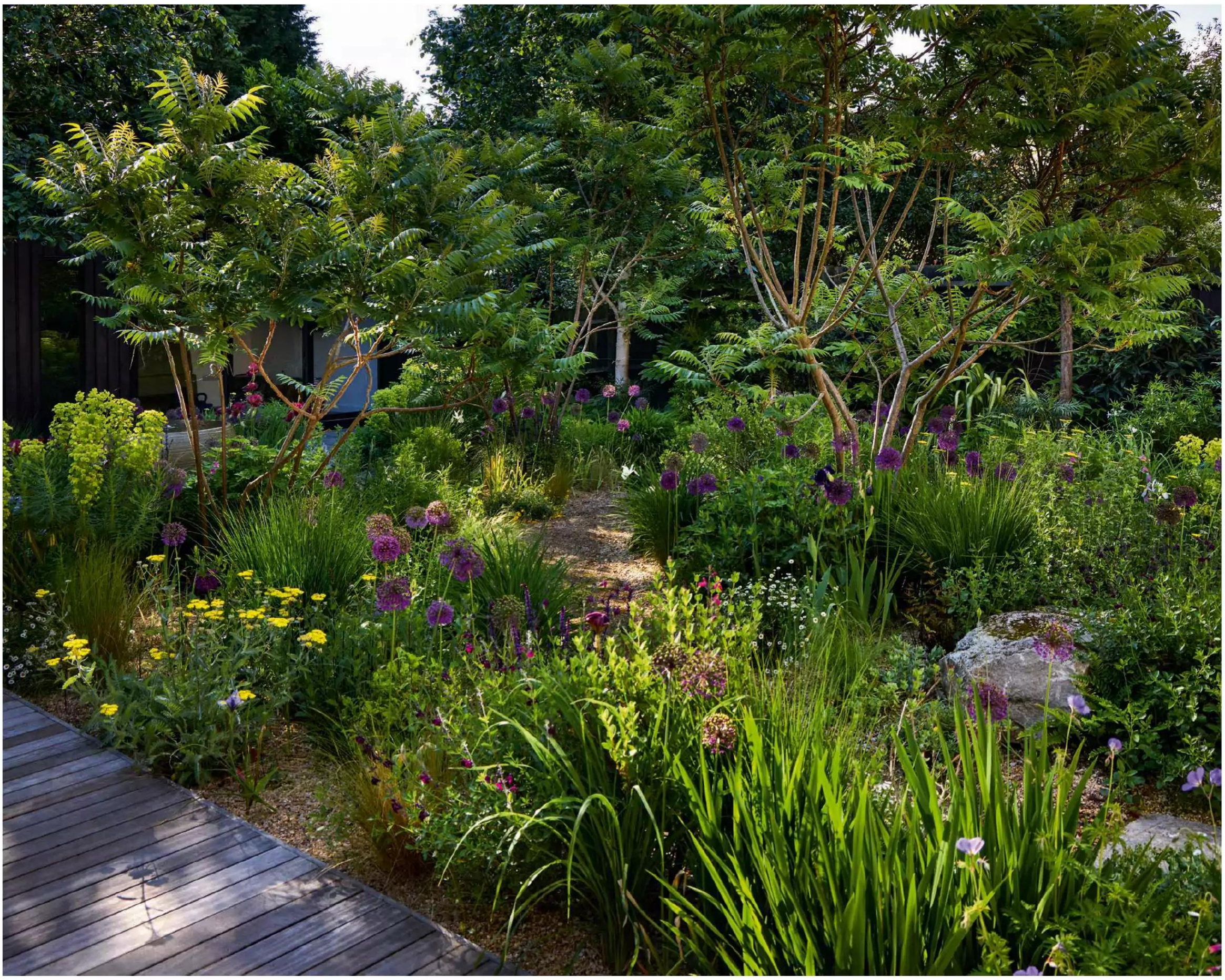
Tired of a garden they never used, Matthew Childs' clients were faced with a decision to either move home, or invest in an upgrade. They chose the latter and asked Matthew what he could do with their tiny terrace, patchy lawn and uninspiring borders.

"We threw out the rule book of what a suburban garden should look like, and asked the clients to come with us on that journey," he says. The brave choice paid off, with a bold design that transformed the conventional plot into a glade of small trees, with textural planting that envelops the space with lush foliage and flowers.

"On our first visit, we could see why our clients had not engaged with the garden. The patio next to the house wasn't really big enough for a dining table, and the design gave you no reason to venture to the end," explains Matthew. "Located at the bottom of a slope, rainwater from the surrounding properties also drains into the garden; a problem the builders partly solved by installing a series of drainage chambers, hidden beneath ugly manhole covers."

The clients' wishlist for the new design included a space for entertaining and cooking, a firepit with lounge seating, a gym building and a hot tub. "They wanted to retain some lawn, too, but we suggested filling that void with planting instead. And while they initially struggled with the idea, they're very open-minded and agreed after we showed them drawings of what we were proposing."

The final design includes all the amenities on the clients' list, blending timber features and strategically placed trees to create ▷



Matthew's tips for creating a pot water feature

1. Locate your feature away from trees to avoid leaf litter, and where you can best enjoy the sound of running water. It should create a focal point while reflecting light onto the surrounding planting.

2. Opt for a pump with a built-in filter, which improves water quality and oxygenation, and a UV clarifier to kill the algae that causes green water. The pump must be connected to a professionally installed outdoor electricity supply.

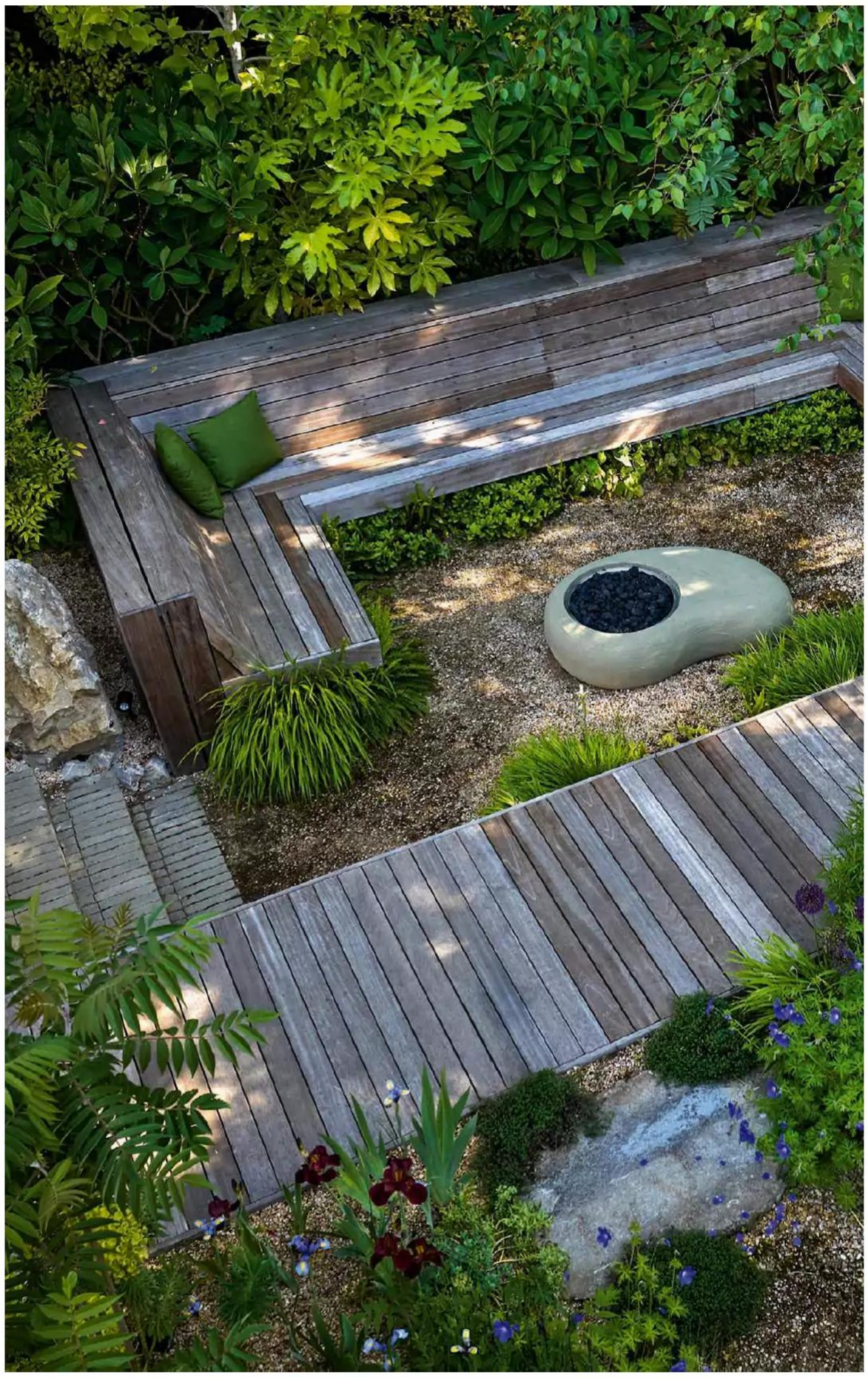
3. You will also need a reservoir – a tub with a perforated lid, which circulates water from the tub to the pot and collects the overflow to recirculate again. It should be broader in circumference than the pot. Dig a hole slightly larger than the reservoir in the place where you plan to put the pot.

4. Insert the reservoir, making sure it is level. Add the pump and ensure the exit pipe will reach up through the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot.

3. Place the lid on the reservoir, and the pot over the exit pipe. Seal the pipe in place with silicone sealant and leave to harden for 24 hours. Fill the reservoir and pot with water, and plug the pump into the mains.

4. Remove debris from the surface weekly, change the water once a month and clean the pump filter regularly to avoid a build up of sludge.

Above *Rhus typhina* trees wave their elegant pinnate leaves above the pompom heads of *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation', blue *Geranium* 'Orion', golden *Achillea* 'Moonshine', purple *Salvia* 'Nachtvlinder' and the little daisies of Mexican fleabane, *Erigeron karvinskianus*.





Above The bespoke balau bench is wrapped in foliage plants including *Fatsia japonica*, *Hakonechloa macra* and *Pachysandra terminalis*. The clients and their guests are warmed on cool evenings by a Fire Pebble firepit from Torc Pots.

▷ enchanting spaces framed by planting. The former patio outside the clients' newly renovated kitchen is now a balau deck, where the couple can enjoy a morning cup of coffee. This leads on to a larger clay-paver dining terrace on the north side of the garden, which receives the afternoon sun. Complete with Grillo barbecue and dining table and chairs, the seating area is shaded by a charred timber pergola.

From here you step down a level to a gravel area edged with a large floating bench, also made from balau. "One of our previous clients designs airline seats and gave us tips on the perfect dimensions for optimum comfort," explains Matthew. This sunken area is quite playful, allowing you to view the planting up close, from a child's perspective, while an elegant Torc firepit creates a focal point in the centre.

A raised boardwalk takes you from the deck alongside the house to a cedar hot tub at the far end of the garden. The gym building can be accessed from here via stepping stones, or along a boardwalk on the opposite side of the garden. This links it to the house and completes the circular walk around the central planted zone.

This central area, formerly the lawn, is now planted with *Rhus typhina* and layers of bulbs, perennials, grasses and mounds of *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum'. "Together they create a kaleidoscope of colours and textures, offering year-round interest. We've turned things inside out, so the planting is in the middle of the garden and the functional areas are around the edges, which means that wherever you are sitting, you're looking out over vignettes of beautiful planting."

Informal gravel tracks, sometimes referred to as 'goat paths' and which the clients playfully refer to as their "paths of curiosity", traverse the central bed, allowing more intimate views of the plants, while a bubbling fountain housed in a large pot animates





the garden with sound and spangles of light. "We also sourced two Kentish ragstone boulders from a local quarry, which have been cut to create flat-topped benches, offering perches from where you can enjoy the plants and wildlife," says Matthew.

The rich planting in the central zone spills out into the rest of the garden. Shrubs, trees, flowers and grasses cocoon the seating area, hot tub and gym, creating shade and privacy. "We were keen to retain some of the existing trees, including two silver birches, to which we added a third for balance, and worked the design around them. We also used a selection of exotic plants such as golden bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea*) and *Tetrapanax papyrifer* 'Rex', to transport the clients to far-off destinations as they soak in the hot tub or relax by the fire," says Matthew.

Drainage was one of the main challenges Matthew and his team had to overcome, but he was inspired by the approach taken to manage water in The Walled Garden at Knepp in West Sussex. "While the drains installed by the builders were working to some extent, we decided to use the plants and permeable materials to create a more porous landscape," he says. The planting, permeable gravel, clay pavers with porous sand joints and raised boardwalks all helped to ameliorate the problem. The boardwalks also disguise the manhole covers over the drains.

The new garden has been a game-changer for Matthew's clients, creating a retreat they use every day of the year. Relaxing outside on warm summer evenings, watching butterflies sipping nectar from the flowers while birds sing from the trees, you certainly feel as though you are a long way from the suburbs of Surrey. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Matthew Childs' work at **matthewchildsdesign.co.uk**

Above, centre The south-facing dining area, defined by a charred timber pergola and Vande Moortel StepimA clay-paver floor, features a table and chairs from Chic Teak, a Grillo barbecue and contemporary Brooklyn Dome Pendant lights by Industville.

Above, right Matthew has designed the cedar hot tub so it visually connects with the water feature in the central zone, while its timber structure also complements the warm tones of the boardwalk. A curtain of golden bamboo (*Phyllostachys aurea*) surrounding the tub creates added privacy.

ACRES WILD

The two designers behind the highly successful design practice on their process and how teaching helps them crystallise ideas

WORDS **CIAR BYRNE** PHOTOGRAPHS **ALUN CALLENDER**

When Debbie Roberts and Ian Smith returned to their native West Sussex in 1988, after meeting on the landscape architecture degree course at what was then Leeds Polytechnic, they both knew they didn't want to spend their days designing planting schemes for car parks and motorway verges.

Back then, there weren't many people designing the private gardens they felt would give them the creativity they craved – just a few big names such as John Brookes, Arabella Lennox-Boyd and David Stevens – but a chance visit to a local nursery looking for work led to their first client.

Both were passionate about conservation, and knew from the outset that they wanted to take an ecological approach to the gardens they designed. This was reflected in the name they chose. "It began as Wild Acres, but that wasn't going to rank us high enough in the directories, so we switched it round," says Debbie.

Thirty-seven years later, Debbie and Ian are still designing gardens together and have built up one of the UK's most respected practices. They have been awarded the Society of Garden and Landscape Designers Large Residential Garden Award three times and were both made Fellows of the Society in 2022. Best known for designing country gardens in southeast England, they have also designed gardens for private clients as far afield as France, Spain and California.

The pair were encouraged in their fledgling careers by fellow Sussex-based garden designer John Brookes, legendary author of *Room Outside*, whom they met in his garden at Denmans. Another influence was the American landscape architect Thomas D Church, who wrote *Gardens Are For People* and pioneered the concept of the outdoor room. The book *Bold Romantic Gardens,* by Wolfgang Oehme and James Van Sweden, was also hugely inspirational on creating larger gardens using grasses and perennials.

In 1991, a recession hit, and the pair turned to teaching to supplement their incomes. By now, there was an increasing appetite for garden design courses, and they both taught at the newly created Oxford College of Garden Design and the Inchbald School of Design. Teaching helped them to crystallise their own ideas about design stemming from a sense of place and grounding a garden in its location.

"Design process was our subject, helping students to think through sketching, and engaging with the idea that there is no such thing as a blank canvas, that gardens are not imposed on a site but evolve from it," says Debbie.

A chance meeting with an old school friend of Debbie's who was writing for the business section of *The Times* in 1995 led to a profile in the newspaper, which Debbie says was a "real springboard" in attracting new clients.

Their process is to visit a garden together in the first instance, then one of them will take the lead on the project, with the other offering a critical eye. They start designing by hand using trace overlays, and the evolved design is then digitised, verified by 3D modelling, further refined and only then presented to the client. The underlying framework is essential, projecting lines from the house, making sure that paths join at 90-degree angles and ensuring curves are geometrically formed, although once the design has been softened with planting, it might not look that way. "Nothing is accidental. Every design decision is made for a reason, and our key words are timeless and enduring," says Debbie. "A garden, especially a country garden, should not shout 'design'," adds Ian. "What makes a garden successful is atmosphere."

> A GARDEN SHOULD NOT SHOUT 'DESIGN'. WHAT MAKES A GARDEN SUCCESSFUL IS ATMOSPHERE

They draw inspiration from Japanese gardens and the Arts and Crafts movement, using materials that are of their place and in the right proportion to the planting. A favourite garden is the one created at Iford Manor in Wiltshire by Harold Peto, the Edwardian landscape architect and contemporary of Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson.

Appropriately, I meet the duo at Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent, where they are spending a few days in the Priest's House, right in the middle of the iconic garden created by Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson. From the windows of the snug where we sit for our interview, we can see the revived Delos garden created with Dan Pearson.

During Covid lockdowns, Debbie and Ian finally had the opportunity to design the garden around their studio in Nuthurst, which was recently featured on BBC *Gardeners' World* and which Debbie often posts about on social media.

After nearly four decades in the business, the Acres Wild duo are now being more selective about the gardens they take on, and hope to spend more time evolving those they have already created. Ian sometimes looks up the gardens on Google Maps. "You've changed a piece of the world," he says, "which is very humbling." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Acres Wild, 1 Helm Cottages, Nuthurst, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 6RG. Tel 01403 891084, acreswild.co.uk

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO CASPAR WESTON IN WHOSE GARDEN, DESIGNED BY ACRES WILD, THIS IMAGE WAS TAKEN



THE ART OF GARDENING

Architect James Chua reveals the inspired creative elements in his beautiful spring woodland garden

PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS

IN BRIEF

What Naturalistic hillside garden.
Where Buckinghamshire.
Size Roughly three acres.
Soil Improved heavy clay.
Climate Temperate, with minimum temperatures of -10°C.
Hardiness zone USDA 8a.

In the Woodland Garden, a mossy path snakes through a glade of trees, including *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Acer campestre* and *Prunus cerasifera*, which James and Emily planted to mark the new millennium in 1999 as 30cm-high saplings. James has edged the path with carefully arranged sticks, cut to precise lengths, which in spring are softened by drifts of *Fritillaria meleagris*, *Anemone nemorosa* and *Galium odoratum*.

In December 1997, we moved from a tiny London garden to our new home, Old Park Barn in Buckinghamshire. It was daunting – a huge leap of faith from gardening in an urban courtyard to essentially an overgrown field. But my wife Emily and I were excited, and looking forward to the challenge.

I had always longed to recreate the feeling of my early childhood, growing up in a tropical garden in rural Borneo. My mother was a keen gardener, and allowed me to grow plants and build structures without restraint. The garden was surrounded by jungle and I had the freedom to roam, discovering wild orchids, gingers and a variety of interesting plants that are considered houseplants in the UK. Moving to Old Park Barn gave me the opportunity to recreate the essence of my past using temperate plants. Here, I could spend my spare time gardening in the fresh air; an antidote to the stress of working in London.

As an architect, I study, observe and analyse the buildings, gardens and art that inspires me. It is still a continual process, so design is very important to me. When it came to planning out the garden, I began by sketching the concept on a small piece of paper. The layout started with a series of formal areas near the house, progressing through naturalistic planting to wilder areas further away. Detailed designs followed, each area involving a lot of thought and many drawings. Allowing time to process, observe and reflect was necessary due to the size of the garden, the availability of resources and the necessity to plant the trees early to give them time to mature. We still modify and refine the design constantly.

The Woodland Garden, furthest from the house, is a wilder area where I let my imagination run free. We celebrated the new millennium by planting more than 500 saplings around 30cm-high of mainly native deciduous trees. After ten years, the tree canopy was dense enough to shade out all the invasive grasses, allowing us to introduce woodland plants and bulbs.

A notable feature of this area is the serpentine path with sinuous curved edging, made from vertical mild steel rods and recycled sticks. The carefully arranged sticks, cut to precise lengths, were inspired by the works of Andy Goldsworthy. Leaves that fall on this path are raked for leaf mould, whereas the ones on the woodland floor are left to accumulate slowly.

Over the years, this has created a thick layer of humus, conditioning our heavy clay soil and allowing woodland plants to thrive and spread. Twenty-eight years on, the trees have matured substantially and the underplanting has naturalised. The slow, resilient growth of soft, green mosses helps to create a calm, Zen-like atmosphere.

In late winter, huge drifts of snowdrops flower against the twisted trunks of the hornbeams. They bring a feeling of magic, and contrast with the marbled green leaves of *Cyclamen hederifolium* and *Arum italicum* 'Marmoratum'. Naturalised *Fritillaria meleagris*, *Helleborus* x *hybridus* and *Anemone nemorosa* spill over, softening the edges of the path in March, followed by bluebells, sweet woodruff and cow parsley in April and May. The scent of cherry-plum blossom and rambling roses fills the spring air.

Further along the woodland path, my River of Sticks flows along the sloping site. Twigs in continuous sinuous shapes follow the contoured curves of the slope, revealing a strata-like structure and giving a sense of movement, like rippling water, echoing the nearby stream.

Emily and I are mindful of the environment and aim to garden responsibly; we stopped having bonfires many years ago. These structures – made from recycled prunings, fallen branches and coppiced wood – are creative ways to reuse what nature gives us for free. The careful arrangement accommodates thousands of sticks in a small space, providing habitat for insects and amphibians, and encouraging biodiversity.

Left alone, moss grows on them and eventually fungi breaks them down, returning organic matter back to the soil. Some of these structures have been here for more than 15 years and they require little maintenance – just removing fallen leaves at the end of autumn and adding a new layer of sticks on top as the bottom sticks decay.

Other features I've made include a giant spider trapping its prey and an artistic arrangement of pine cones under the grove of Scots pines. My inspiration for making playful elements like this come from visiting new places and exhibitions, reading books and journals and meeting new gardening friends, all of which generate new ideas. Gardening keeps us healthy, and gives us purpose, as this is a continual learning process. It will always be a work in progress. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Old Park Barn, Stoke Goldington, Buckinghamshire MK16 8NY. **Open** For the NGS, 20-21 June 2026, 1.30-5pm, and by arrangement. **ngs.org.uk**

Turn the page to see more of the garden

Moving to Old Park Barn gave me the opportunity to recreate the essence of my past using temperate plants

The sinuous curves at the path entrance are edged with recycled sticks pinned in place with vertical steel rods that restrain naturalised drifts of *Helleborus* x *hybridus* and *Fritillaria meleagris*.

These structures – made from recycled prunings, fallen branches and coppiced wood – are creative ways to reuse what nature gives us for free

One of James's three River of Sticks installations, which he creates using vertical elder stakes enclosing recycled sticks, meticulously arranged to resemble ripples of water. He was inspired by Ai Weiwei's piece, *Straight*, a powerful statement on the tragedy of the Sichuan earthquake.

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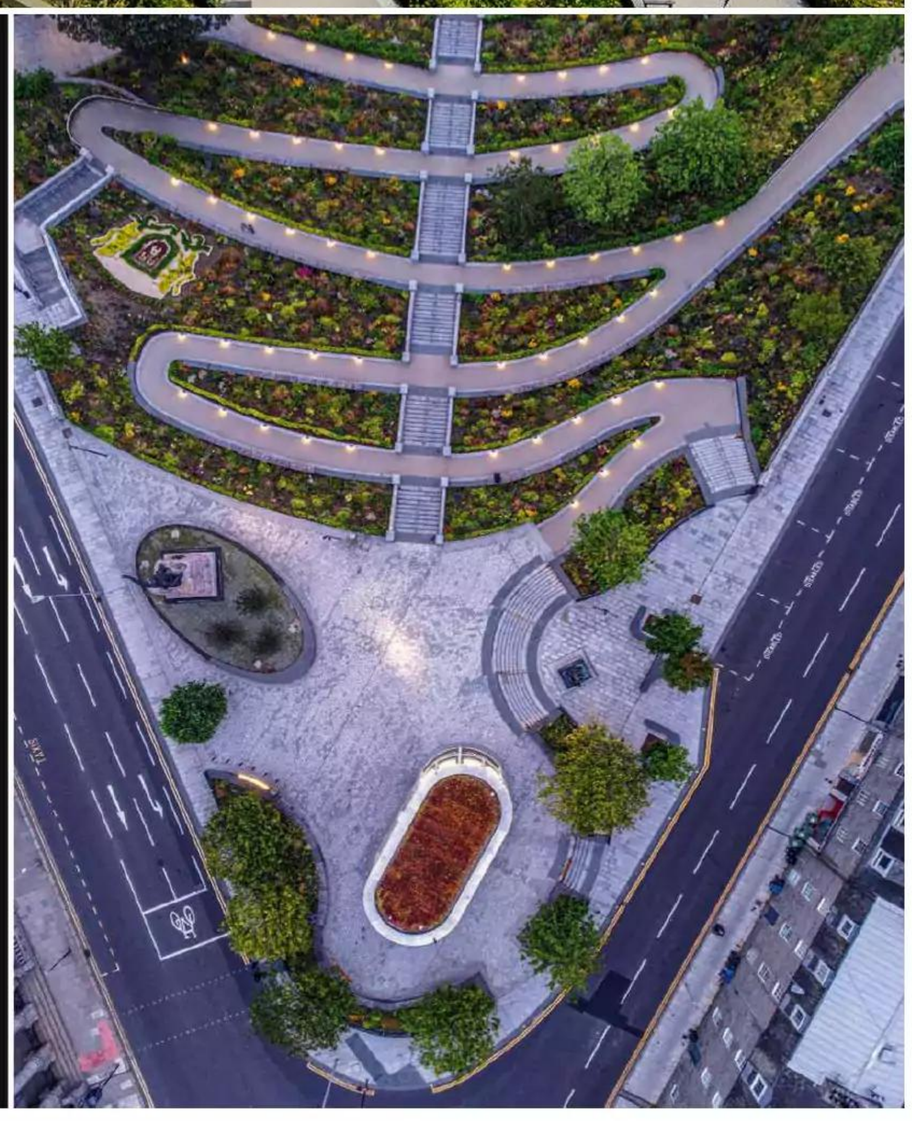
News, design insights and sourcebook



NORTHERN SOUL

Sunken into Aberdeen's steep Denburn Valley, a revitalised two-and-a-half-acre garden has introduced 90 new mature trees and 122,000 plants to the city centre. Once a Victorian pleasure ground, and central to Aberdeen life, Union Terrace Gardens had deteriorated and become overgrown and unwelcoming. Thanks to a transformative scheme by planning and design consultancy LDA Design, it is now a thriving amphitheatre of biodiverse wildflower meadows with species-rich perennial planting and more than 78,000 bulbs. Generous, accessible new pathways allow for exploration among naturalistic drifts of long-flowering perennials including yarrows, salvias, echinaceas and verbenas; and soft grasses, including species of *Miscanthus* and *Molinia*.

Featuring low-maintenance, climate-resilient and pollinator-friendly plants, the restored space has a varied planting palette designed to provide interest throughout the seasons, with blossom, bark and fragrance from trees and shrubs including witch hazels, viburnums and amelanchiers. From autumn, vibrant colour comes from bulbs, such as *Arum*, *Colchicum* and *Cyclamen*. The designers also preserved the site's mature sycamore, lime and ornamental cherry trees, and added airy multi-stem birches, oaks and Japanese *Zelkova serrata* for movement. **lda-design.co.uk**



CHRISTOPHER SWAN/LDA DESIGN, HARDSCAPE



MOVING ON UP

By linking the levels of this steeply sloping garden, Tony Woods has combined a sleek modern aesthetic with space to enjoy nature

WORDS **CHRIS YOUNG** PHOTOGRAPHS **RACHEL WARNE**

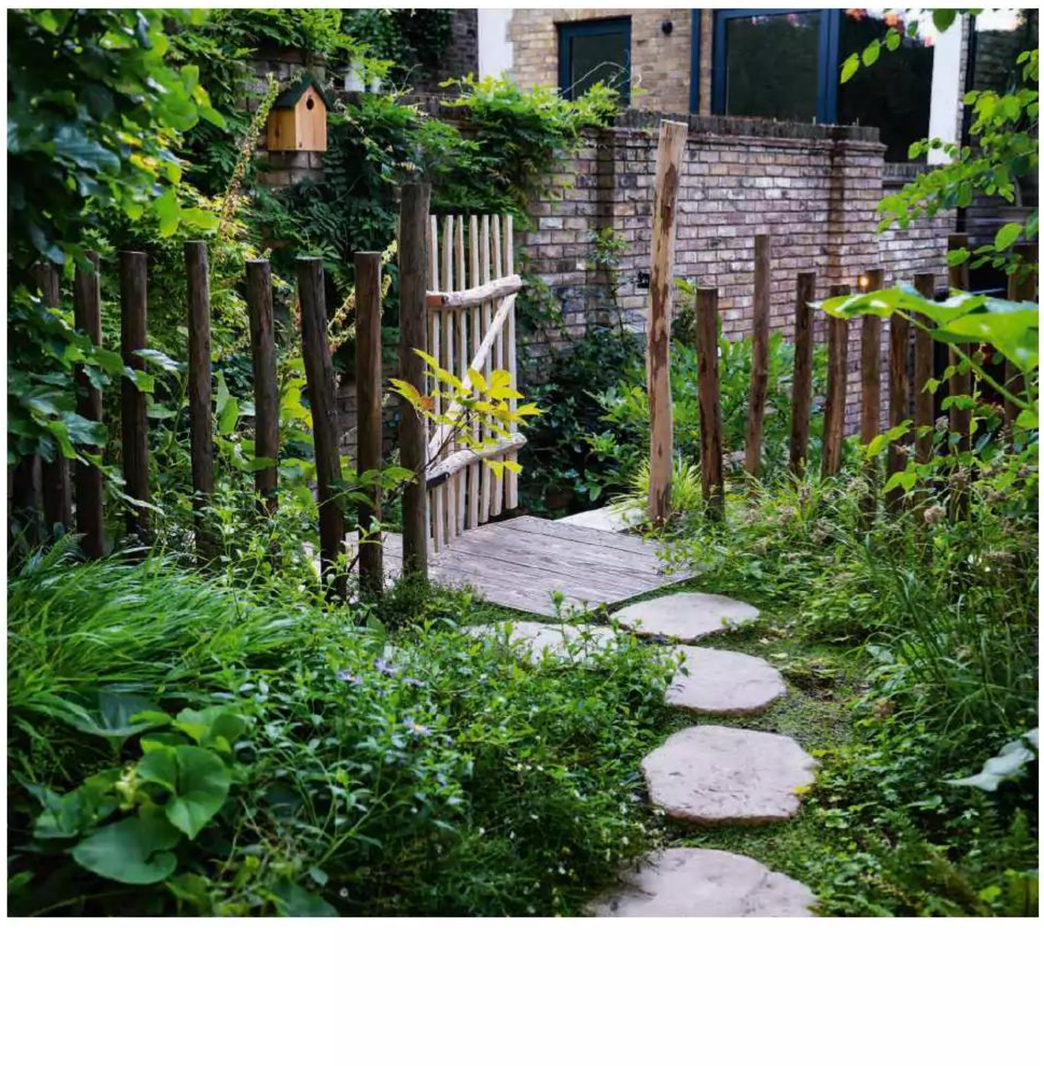
When Tony Woods, founding director of Garden Club London, was called in to design this garden for a couple with two young children, he was excited to find that they knew exactly what they wanted – a nature-based garden. "Mounds of old soil, log piles and areas for different habitats were all part of the brief," he explains.

The site in Maida Vale, west London, was small and challenging; just 113 square metres, with a sharp rise of 3m from the back of the house to the end of the garden. Tony was asked to create an area for entertaining and for the garden to be a safe space for the children to play in. With a not-insubstantial budget of £165,000, he responded by designing a garden of two halves. Near the house, just outside the basement-level kitchen, he created a seating and dining area, with planting for year-round interest. Further up the slope, he made an informal 'wilderness garden', designed for exploration.

It was a tricky build, with the only access for materials and the team being through the house, but in just 18 weeks the garden was transformed from a simple paved area with a set of steep, unsafe steps into a hard-working, lush outdoor space fit for a busy family.

None of this was at the expense of nature or the environment: the environmental impact of the scheme was a key part of Tony's self-imposed remit: to deliver a garden that would last and contribute to biodiversity. "We retained as many existing materials as possible to reduce waste and deliver value," he says. This includes the limestone paving outside the kitchen, upon which they built the new composite decking structure. Why not wood? "Every material has an environmental impact," he concedes. "Composite materials are made of plastic; but timber doesn't last as long. After the build, we always give our clients a summary of the materials used, and an idea of the impact of changing or altering them in the future."▷

Turn the page to discover more about this design



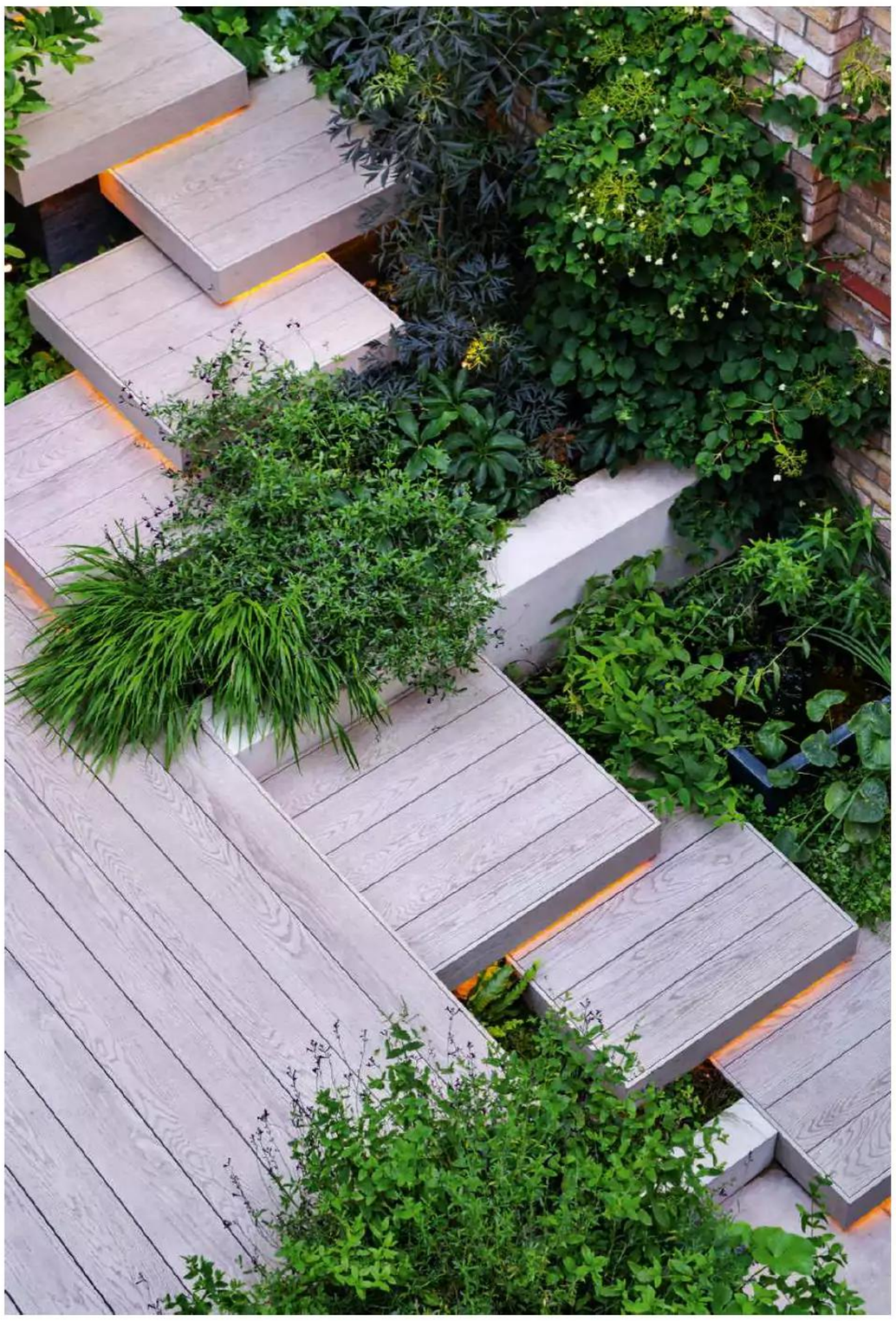
A garden of two halves

“The previous owners had undertaken a substantial renovation on the house,” says Tony. “And that included removing tonnes of soil from the garden. The result was that we had a blank canvas to work with, and could make two quite different areas.”

From the kitchen, bifold doors open onto a small area of limestone slabs (above). Planting softens the look, with a dedicated planter featuring herbs, such as sage, chives and lemon verbena, to offer scent, colour and edible interest.

Offset ‘floating’ steps lead up to a landing and the seating and dining area: an in-situ iroko bench, with hidden storage for toys, hoses and garden tools. Around the bench, deep planters host a range of trees and shrubs.

At the top of the garden is the ‘wilderness’ garden (left). It is entered via a gate in a chestnut-paling fence, which gives the area an informal look and also forms a safety barrier so the children can play freely. This lush, green, wilder garden forms a shaded and ever-changing backdrop that invites nature play and discovery, and creates a much-needed space for wildlife in the city.



Stepping up in style

One of the most impressive features of the garden is the flight of steps that has been constructed using Millboard composite decking, with the steps laid so that they appear to float. "We used the software SketchUp to work out the size, spacing and height of the steps," explains Tony. "To ensure there were no trip hazards, or access for vermin, we used a black, backing composite framework to form a small shadow line or gap to each step, then added soft LED warm-white lighting strips in the gaps."

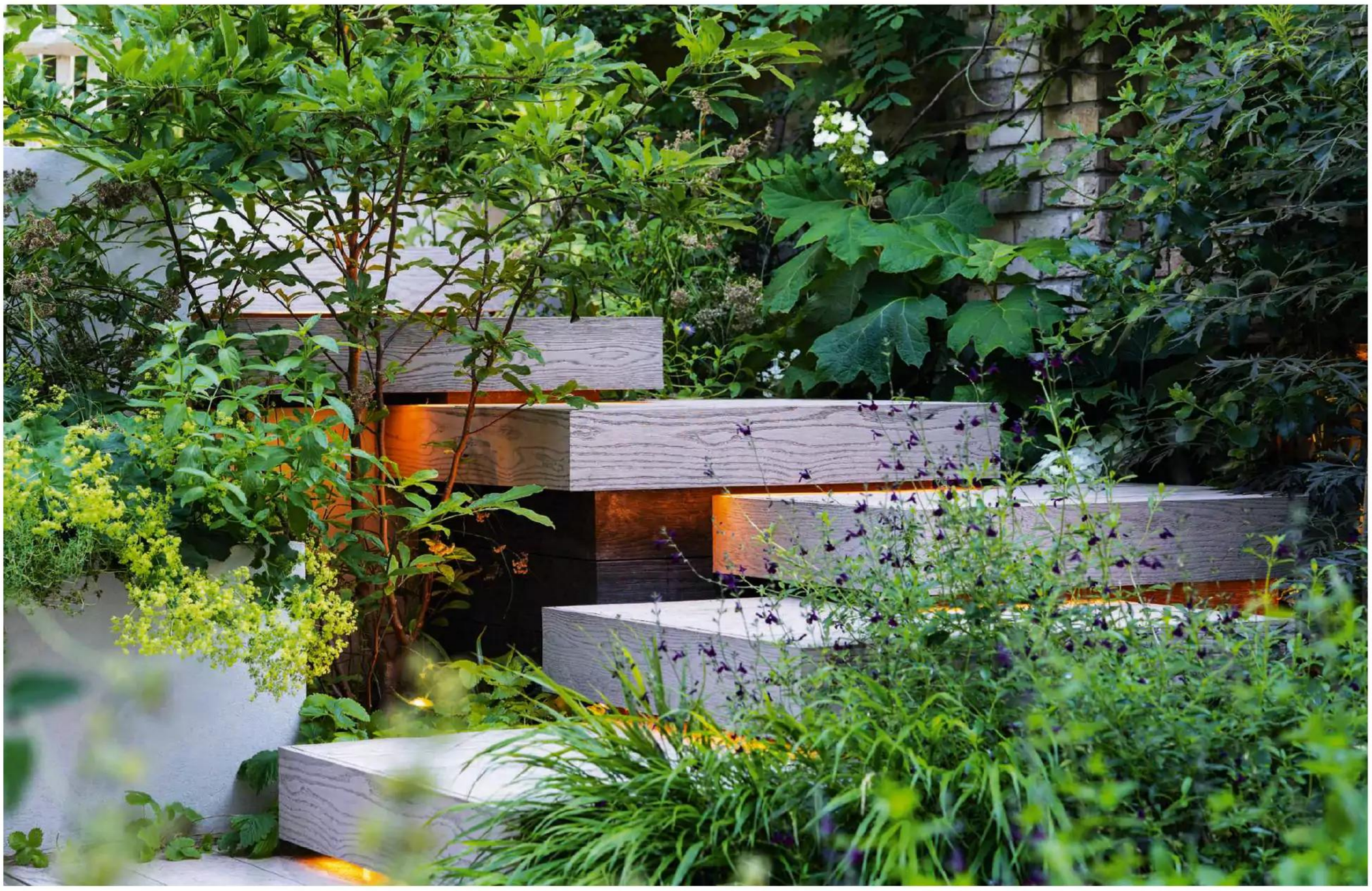
The result is a series of staggered, offset, overlaid steps. "By ensuring the surrounding planting is quite blocky and substantial, it helps balance the size of the steps," says Tony.

Multi-tasking planting

The planting in the garden is a mix of foliage plants, shrubs and delicate groundcovers to add habitat and extend seasonal interest through spring flowers and rich autumn colour.

Tony clothed the stark and echoey walls with climbers, including *Wisteria sinensis* and *Hydrangea petiolaris*, and shrubs, such as black-leaved *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva' and a fig. Flowers including *Paeonia rockii* and *Angelica archangelica* wrap around the seating area, with winter interest from witch hazel *Hamamelis* x *intermedia*. Other stalwart choices include *Luzula nivea*, lime-yellow-flowered *Alchemilla mollis*, the bright-green Japanese forest grass *Hakonechloa macra*, purple *Salvia* 'Nachtvlinder' and spires of foxglove *Digitalis purpurea* f. *albiflora* in spring.

In the upper garden, perennials such as *Anemone blanda*, *Polygonatum* x *hybridum*, *Galium odoratum*, *Paris quadrifolia*, *Cornus canadensis* and *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Looking Glass' grow beneath woody plants, including *Hydrangea quercifolia*, *Viburnum opulus* and *Euonymus europaeus* 'Red Cascade'.





Welcoming in the wild

The clients were keen to bring as much nature and biodiversity into their London plot as they could. They had seen photos of previous iterations of the garden on estate agent's particulars and wanted to hark back to its more relaxed style.

To that end, Tony created the upper garden area as a small but informal, nature-inspired space. Through the chestnut gate is a hammock for relaxing in, with stepping stone paths through planting to a willow den, play area and bird feeders (left) among a mix of trees, shrubs and shade-tolerant, woodland-edge perennials.

It's an antidote to the urban surroundings, with plenty of places for biodiversity to establish and thrive, and space for the two young children to play – who doesn't love a mud kitchen?

For pathways, Tony used a mix of hardwood log stepping stones and reconstituted stone (concrete) stepping stones. The reconstituted stone may not have been his first choice, but for an area that isn't often viewed, they are a cost-effective way of providing easy access. They also weather quickly, so few people would be able to tell them apart from natural stone.



Illuminating ideas

For Tony and his team at Garden Club London, lighting is not about illuminating a whole garden; it's about focusing on the key areas and ensuring the safety of routes through the space. His top rule for lighting is: "If you can see the plants, you've done it right; if you can see the people, you've done it wrong." He also points out the importance of considering wildlife when it comes to outdoor lighting schemes, because of the implications lighting can have for nocturnal creatures.

In addition to the practical, there is also the visual consideration. This garden can be seen from all four storeys of the house, so lighting creates a connection to the garden throughout the year, whatever the weather. "Installing lighting can be a wise investment as it ensures there is a visual link from the building to the garden any day or night of the year," he explains. For best results, Tony advises to always opt for low-voltage, warm-white LEDs, as they give the most sympathetic (and economical) light.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Tony Woods' work at **gardenclublondon.co.uk**

SUPPLIERS

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Millboard composite decking, Limed Oak from London Stone. Tel 07562 205171, londonstone.co.uk

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Fencing
Rustic chestnut fence and garden gate both by Woven Wood. Tel 0118 315 2122, wovenwood.co.uk

Willow dome
From Yorkshire Willow. Tel 01706 839170, yorkshirewillow.co.uk

Lighting
Collingwood mini LED spike spots and wall lights, and Orlight LED strips, from Parker & Bartley. Tel 020 7183 8068, parkerandbartley.co.uk
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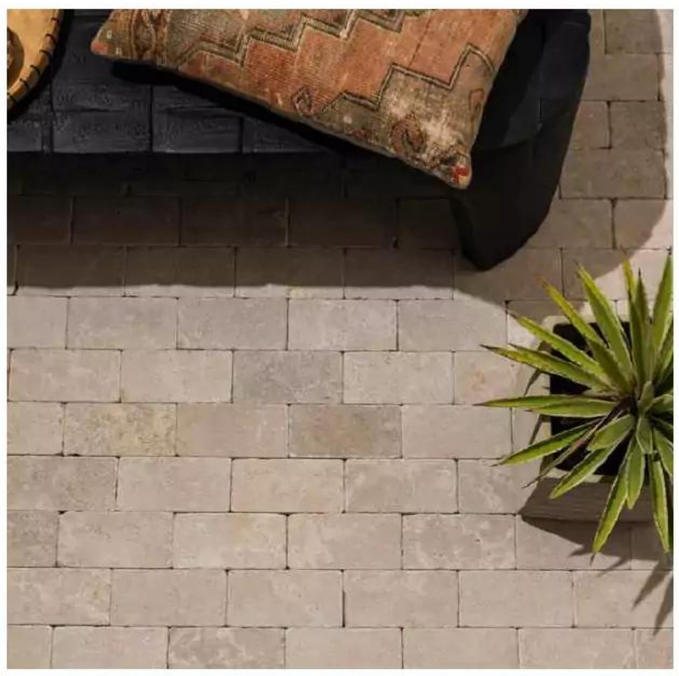
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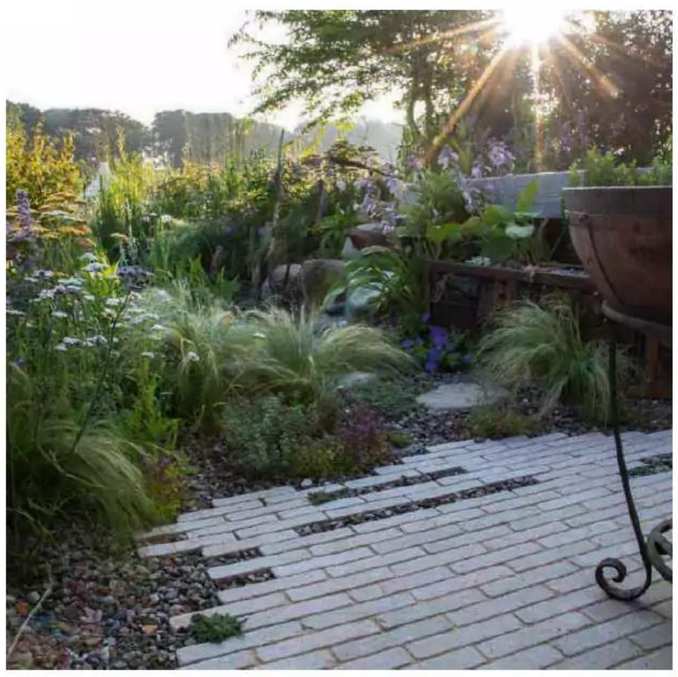
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FRESH PICKS

Fancy growing something different this season? Top plant sellers and nurseries told us which brand-new, recently introduced or simply fresh-to-their-lists plants they are excited about this year

WORDS VERONICA PEERLESS

GEUM 'CHERRY BAKEWELL'

The new *Geum* Dessert Series, exclusively grown and developed for Farmer Gracy, sounds good enough to eat. It includes 'Victoria Sponge', 'Battenberg Cake', 'Jam Roly-Poly' and 'Cherry Bakewell', in a mouthwatering range of shades, from peach, apricot and salmon-pink to raspberry-red and cream. The hybrid avens *Geum* 'Cherry Bakewell' has semi-double, red-pink flowers over a long period that are attractive to bees and other pollinators. Suitable for growing in a border or in a pot, in full sun or part shade. Height and spread: 30-50cm x 30-50cm. Available from Farmer Gracy.

FARMER GRACY

PHILADELPHUS
‘PEARLS OF PERFUME’

This new mock orange has a naturally upright habit and gives an extravagant display of strongly scented, double flowers. Unlike many *Philadelphus*, the blossoms don’t only concentrate at the tips but stud the length of each branch, and the flowers appear in generous clusters from May right through to August. Ideal for borders or pots. 1-1.2m x 50-70cm. Suppliers include Dobies and Farmer Gracy.

FARMER GRACY



JONATHAN BUCKLEY / SARAH RAVEN

DAHLIA 'SISSINGHURST'

Exclusive to, and bred for, Sarah Raven, this sumptuous dahlia is one of several that are new at Sarah Raven this year. It is inspired by Vita Sackville-West's rich interiors at Sissinghurst, with dark-red petals that fade to a milky-coffee colour at the edge. It makes an excellent cut flower, with a vase life of more than seven days. Grow in full sun. 90cm x 60cm. Available from Sarah Raven.



HOSTA 'RED NINJA'

A breakthrough in hosta breeding that has excited hosta fanatics: a red-leaved hosta. The leaves are a deep burgundy-red, with a green edge, held on red stems; the red colour gradually softens as the season progresses, becoming a red blush. Grow in part or dappled shade as it needs some sun to colour up well. 50-70cm x 50-70cm. Suppliers include Crocus, Farmer Gracy and Sienna Hosta.



ANISODONTEA 'CANDY APPLE'

A brand new colour for this popular and long-flowering South African sub-shrub, commonly known as Cape mallow. A new cultivar in the Carnival Lights series, it boasts large, deep-red flowers from May all the way through to November – and even later in a mild winter. Sun-loving and drought tolerant. 80cm x 60cm. Available from Hillier from May.



HOSEIONT NURSERIES

MISCANTHUS SINENSIS 'LADY IN RED'

Shortlisted for RHS Chelsea Plant of the Year 2025. The striking, purple-tinged green foliage turns a vivid red as temperatures drop in autumn; it contrasts strongly with the silver flowers. Grow in full sun. 1.2m x 1m. Suppliers include Ashcroft's Perennials and Ornamental Grasses, Crocus, Farmer Gracy, Hayloft and Thompson & Morgan.



CHILTERN SEEDS

DAHLIA 'BLACK FOREST RUBY'

An opportunity to grow a dark-leaved dahlia from seed: if sown this spring, it should flower in its first year. 'Black Forest Ruby' has almost-black foliage with vibrant red, single, semi-double or double flowers. It is perfect for borders or pots. 70cm x 30cm. Suppliers include Chiltern Seeds, Dobies, Kings Seeds, Suttons and Thompson & Morgan.



PINUS DENSIFLORA 'UMBRACULIFERA'

Not a new cultivar but one of several new multi-stems available at New Wood Trees this year. These include *Acer cappadocicum* 'Rubrum', *Malus* Red Jewel (= 'Jewelcole') and this hardy Tanyosho pine from Japan. It has a naturally multi-stem shape and forms an umbrella-shaped, evergreen canopy. Perfect for structure in a small garden. 4m x 2-4m.



COSMOS SULPHUREUS ‘DIABLO’

An old cultivar from the USA that is rarely available in the UK and new to the Special Plants catalogue this year. The bright-tangerine, semi-double flowers are borne atop tall stems (unusual for a *Cosmos sulphureus* cultivar) and finely cut foliage. Needs a sheltered position in full sun. 90cm x 60cm. Available from Special Plants Nursery.



EUPHORBIA X *GAYERI* ‘BETTEN’

A compact, clump-forming euphorbia with narrow, blue-green leaves topped in late spring by long-lasting chartreuse to yellow-green bracts. Frost hardy down to -20°C and drought tolerant once established. Thrives in well-drained soil and full sun to part shade. 60cm x 45cm. Available from How Green Nursery (wholesale only).



RUDBECKIA HIRTA ‘SHERRY BRANDY’

A cross between the popular ‘Cherry Brandy’ and ‘Sahara’, this mix contains single, semi-double and double blooms in shades of dark-red, pinky-caramel, gold and copper. Each flower is 5-7cm across on tall stems; perfect for cutting. If sown early, plants will flower in their first year. 60cm x 30cm. Available from Chiltern Seeds.



CROCUS.CO.UK

POLEMONIUM VIOLET HEART (= ‘TUIPOL’)

This compact, upright and clump-forming Jacob’s ladder has delicate white flowers with a striking violet-purple eye, set off by deep-toned sepals, in spring and early summer. The finely divided foliage is edged with a subtle purple flush, especially in cooler weather. Grow in full sun or part shade. 40cm x 40cm. Available from Crocus.



PITTOSPORUM TOBIRA X *P. HETEROPHYLLUM* GREEN MOUND (= ‘JULEI’)

An new, sterile hybrid between *P. tobira* and *P. heterophyllum*, which has inherited the best characteristics of each parent, with much increased flowering. Developed by the French breeder Frédéric Julien. Grow in full sun to light shade. Hardy down to -12°C. 1.5m x 1.5m. Available from Hillier from May.



JASON INGRAM

LOMELOSIA CRETICA

A new name for *Scabiosa cretica* and a new plant for Special Plants Nursery. Compact, grey foliage is topped by lavender-blue scabious flowers for months, with perfectly spherical white seedheads. Likes full sun and excellent drainage, and is very drought tolerant. Avoid winter wet. 50cm x 60cm.

• For more new plants, head to **gardensillustrated.com/newplants**

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DOWNTOOLS

Book reviews, Q&A, the crossword and Jack Wallington's final say



Layering different spring bulbs, such as this highly fragrant, double-flowered daffodil *Narcissus* 'Erlicheer', in borders or in pots is one of Milli Proust's great tips for creating dynamic displays, which she shares in her new book *How Does Your Garden Grow?* (page 105).

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW? BY MILLI PROUST (QUADRILLE, £22) PHOTOGRAPHY BY ÉVA NÉMETH



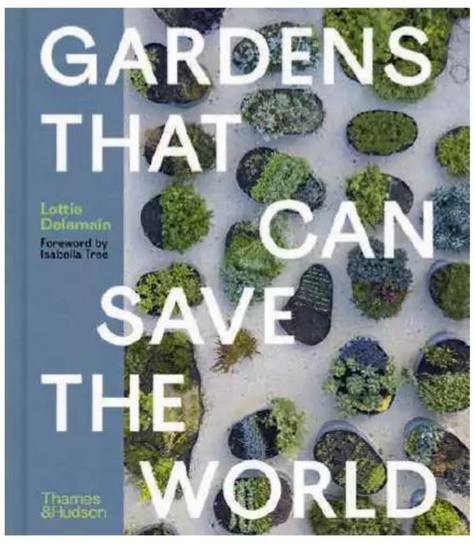


Clockwise from this image Alison Jenkins' pioneering edible garden, Damson Farm in Somerset; Knepp Walled Garden in West Sussex; New York's High Line.

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Thames & Hudson, £30
ISBN 978-0500028742

It is hard to overstate the potent timeliness of Lottie Delamain's book. Against a backdrop of unsustainable human activity and climate crisis, this is a well-researched and beautifully presented collection of 65 inspiring green projects around the world powered by hope and innovation; some are so moving they brought me to tears.

Divided into five chapters – Repair, Empower, Nourish, Heal and Reimagine – it neatly illustrates the transformative power of gardens, with thought-provoking texts and features on some of the 'green thinkers' of our time. You will find a handful of recognisable names such as Sue and Tom Stuart-Smith, Nigel Dunnett and Piet Oudolf, and a pleasing number of incredible projects led by communities, individuals, collectives and local councils, which leave quite an impression. From large-scale public parks and high-rise buildings to small-scale seed-sowing in the most unlikely of places, the variety included here illustrates the breadth of action required to effect positive change, yet somehow makes it feel possible.

This is not a practical how-to book, although the glossary will give you more than enough ingredients to create a biodiverse garden of your own. Rather, it is a book that motivates on a much deeper level. I challenge anyone to read these stories and not be inspired to do something. One humbling example is the Seeds of Resilience initiative. Led by a small group of young people in Gaza, it is growing food in the most precarious of situations to foster agency, security and renewal. The image of a tray of fresh-green seedlings, framed by the ▷

ÉVA NÉMETH, CHARLIE HARPUR, CARSTENBRANDT / GETTY IMAGES.

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West Linton, Edinburgh EH46 7BB | quercusgardenplants.co.uk



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Forde Abbey, Chard, Somerset TA20 4LU | fordeabbey.co.uk



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Chippenham, Ely, Cambs CB7 5PT | 01638 721416 | chippenhampark.co.uk



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Refreshingly, this book does not shy away from historical and socio-political issues

▷ monochrome backdrop of wartime destruction, is one I won't forget.

The projects featured vary from seasonal floristry and natural skincare to post-industrial parks and vertical gardens on city tower blocks – all connected by their capacity to give something back. There's the community allotment in Brazil that produces tonnes of fruit and vegetables to support local families, the Nordic Therapy Garden treating widespread PTSD in Ukraine, and the fire-preventing garden in Australia so effective at collecting and managing water it is used by the local fire brigade. Despite, or perhaps because of, the profound topics addressed, many of the images have a striking and easeful beauty not seen in your average garden design compendium.

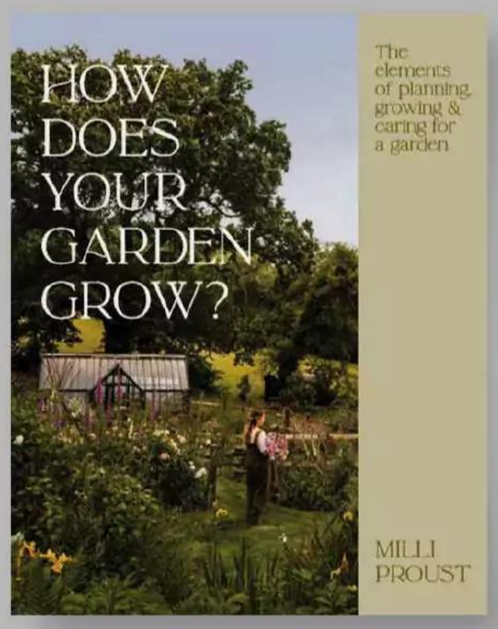
Refreshingly, this book does not shy away from historical and socio-political issues. Writing on plant hunting of the British Empire and the binary nomenclature of plant classification in the Empower chapter, Delamain reminds us of the complex questions we might gently seek to answer while we grow.

This eclectic collection of resilient gardens from myriad cultures is fitting given this shift, and the movement towards a deeper understanding of the inherent power of plants and landscapes in an era when ecosystems are being granted rights, and rivers are being assigned legal personhood.

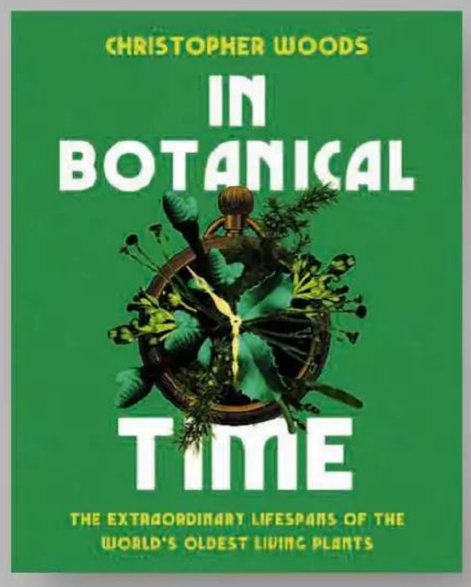
Ultimately, this is a truly uplifting book about human endeavour. All these gardens are inextricably linked to the care that humans put into them, for what else can a garden be? It would be tempting to feel we should leave nature alone given the damage our species has done in the past century, but this book shows that we can do better than that, and we should. □

Reviewer **Lucy Conochie** is an award-winning garden and landscape designer.

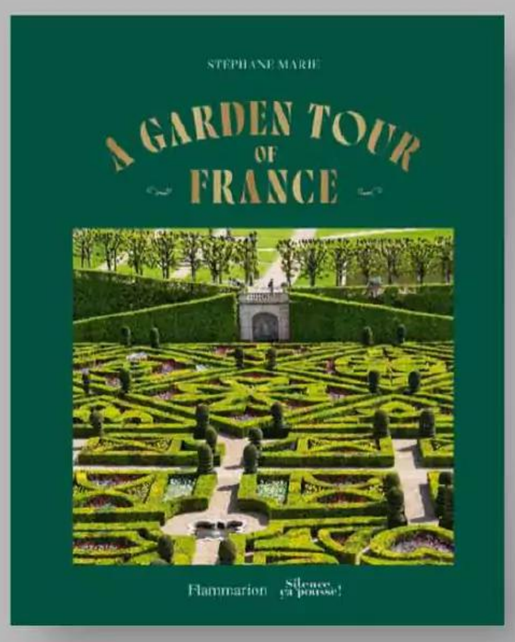
Recommended reads this month



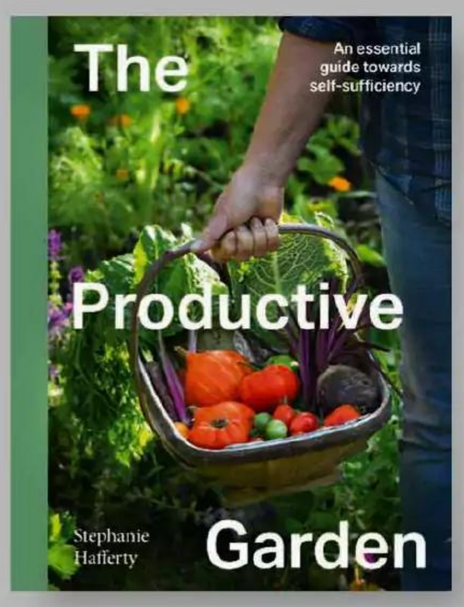
HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW? THE ELEMENTS OF PLANNING, GROWING & CARING FOR A GARDEN
by Milli Proust
Quadrille, £22
ISBN 978-1837832255
Gardener and expert flower grower Milli Proust shares a decade of experience to help new and budding gardeners create a beautiful outdoor sanctuary. Sumptuous photography by Éva Németh from Proust's own garden comprehensively covers the basics, as well as giving readers the confidence to play with colour and texture.



IN BOTANICAL TIME
by Christopher Woods
Chelsea Green, £32
ISBN 978-1645023159
Explores the histories and survival mechanisms of some of the world's longest-lived plants, and looks at the lessons to be drawn from the way these remarkable species have adapted to their environments – including some of the harshest places on the planet.



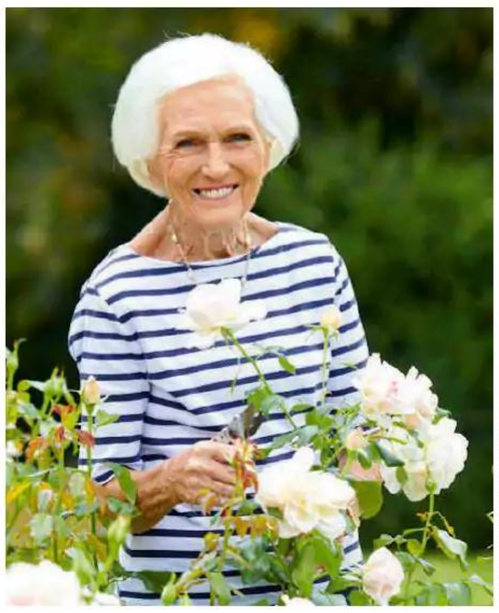
A GARDEN TOUR OF FRANCE
by Stéphane Marie
Rizzoli, £35
ISBN 978-2080498120
Showcases 27 of France's most remarkable and imaginative gardens, all open to the public and many recognised with the Jardin Remarquable label, which means that they are of cultural, aesthetic, historical or botanical interest.



THE PRODUCTIVE GARDEN
by Stephanie Hafferty
Frances Lincoln, £25
ISBN 978-0711293335
No-dig expert Hafferty shows how to work towards a more self-sufficient lifestyle. As well as extensive planning and growing advice, she includes recipes for preserves, oils, ferments, cordials, chemical-free cleaners, soaps and fragrances, herbal remedies and more.



FLORA CULTURE: HOW FLOWERS SHAPE OUR WORLD
by Christin Geall
Rizzoli, £32.50
ISBN 978-0847876136
Writer, designer and photographer Christin Geall covers hot topics such as aesthetics, appropriation, fair trade, floriculture, globalisation, indigeneity, modernism, seasonality and tokenism in this sumptuous and thought-provoking book.



BRITT WILLOUGHBY

‘We each had a gin and tonic, and would hoe and chat’

The cookery writer, broadcaster and former president of the National Garden Scheme **Mary Berry** on her new book and the joy of visiting gardens

What is your new book about? It’s about my gardening life, from when I was small. It’s about all the mistakes I’ve made, everything I’ve learned, and how the garden has become such an essential part of my life. Whenever you visit a garden, there’s always a hint or idea you can pick up. Just recently, someone suggested lifting lily-of-the-valley when the tops are just appearing — dig out a chunk, put it in a pot, bring it indoors, and you’ll have a pot of wonderful scent.

What advice would you like to share from the book? Whatever size your garden, enjoy it – and don’t rush. Do a little bit at a time. If you can only garden at weekends, spend the whole day and do it with a friend. I used to run an AGA school from home and in the evenings, I would go out into the garden with a girlfriend, Penny, who used to help me out. We each had a swoe [a type of hoe] and a gin and tonic, and we’d hoe and chat – it was really lovely after being cooped up all day.

What book is on your nightstand? Alan Titchmarsh’s *The Gardener’s Almanac*. I open it each month and it tells me everything I ought to have done.

What first sparked your interest in gardening? When I was very young, it was wartime and there was no entertainment – we were at home and in the garden. In the back of my mind I can name every plant there, so I must have been slightly interested. My first garden with my husband was a very small yard in London, and we made a planting bed at the end. I was trying to grow the flowers I’d grown up with, but it was shady, and they weren’t successful at all. Felicity Bryan, my book agent, said, “Wait until you have to spend less time with the children – then I’m sure you’ll enjoy gardening.” And she was absolutely right. By that time we had moved out of London, to Penn, and the garden was fairly empty. I started reading and visiting other people’s gardens, and the interest came.

What’s your current garden like? When we moved to our current home in Henley, Bunny Guinness helped with the design of the garden. She’s given it a lovely balance and structure. We put in a lot of yew hedging to screen the tennis court and it has grown rapidly (watered with a leaky hose).

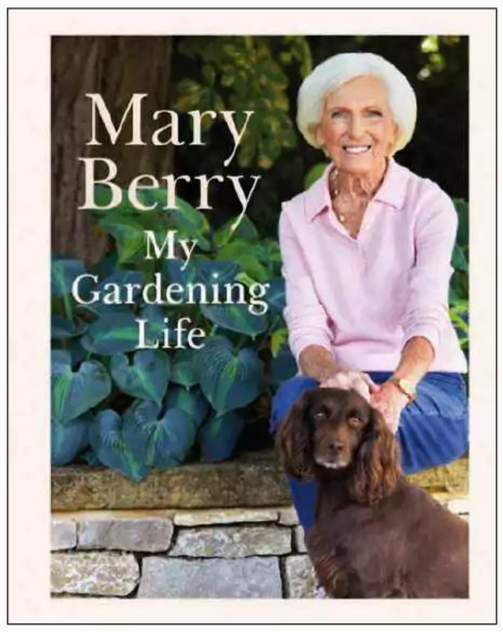
We made six raised beds in brick, and their height means I can sit on the edge comfortably. We’ve just planted espalier pear trees – I love ‘Conference’ pears and wanted to grow them myself.

Can you share your biggest gardening mistake or failure? Planting in the wrong place, not considering height and not improving the soil enough. When we planted roses here, we dug out the soil, replaced it and fed it, and they’ve been very successful. I also plant them a bit closer together for a better show.

Is there something about gardening that you wish you’d known earlier? The importance of planting things in the right place. And when you’ve just planted something, it’s important to water it in well and not to forget to continue watering it for its first year. Even if it’s raining, you still have to continually water pots.

What’s your favourite garden to visit? RHS Garden Wisley. My treat is to go at different times of the year and to different parts of it. It’s spacious and you can investigate your problem of the moment. I have a peach tree, and at Wisley they cover their peach trees with glass structures. We had a similar one made in Perspex that we put over it so that it has protection in winter, rather than just fleece – so you can get all sorts of ideas there.

Do you have a guilty gardening secret? Every year I grow three amaryllis in a pot, put moss on top and support them with twigs. But when they’ve finished, I’ve had no success with them coming back. I vow that I’m going to read up on how to do it. □



MY GARDENING LIFE
by Mary Berry
DK, £25
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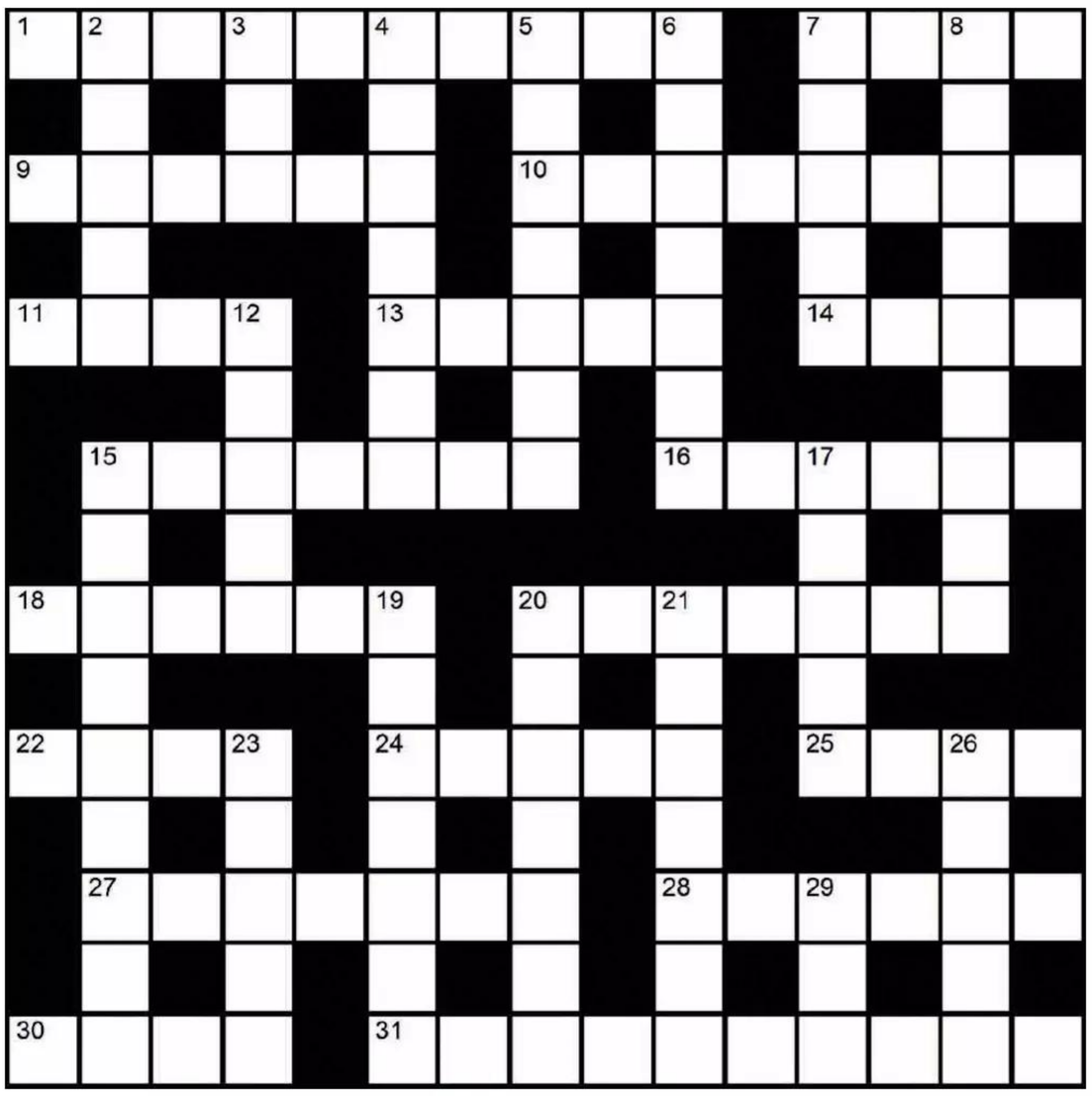
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Crossword



ACROSS

1 Aromatic herb *Ocimum basilicum* – astilbes we modified! (5,5)
7/29 down Dandelion-like wildflower, *Hypochaeris radicata* – Tom's spike of corn? (4,3)
9 A plant ____ sap from pruning cut (6)
10 Evergreen shrub with rose-like flowers, in tea family (8)
11 A dark-purple dessert plum; old Russian ruler (4)
13 Cultivar of lilies with orange-striped, white flowers – are an alternative (5)
14 __ Fowler, British horticulturist and journalist (4)
15 Long-handled pruning tool (7)
16 A blushed-pink, white flowering *Alstroemeria* (Peruvian lily) – in a vat, possibly (6)
18 Species term meaning bitter, as in switch grass *Panicum* ____ – ma put in arum (6)
20 Blue-flowering *Echium vulgare* or viper's ___ (7)
22 Latin species epithet ('white') … in perennial baptisia (4)
24 It could be the death of slugs … being unusually large? (5)
25 Genus of South African ornamental orchid with over 170 species – said to change (4)
27 Genus of NZ kōwhai plants with pea-like flowers – makes poor ash (7)
28 Genus of grass-like plant in restio family – in part abele (giant) (6)
30 Eg raspberry stem – or birch? (4)
31 Species name meaning privet-leaved – 'Ugli' strain, maybe (10)

DOWN

2 A crisp, red ballerina apple named after ballroom dance (5)
3 Regard a potato's seed-bud (3)
4 Gazebo's cagework encloses a mass of shrubs (7)
5 Root offshoots (7)
6 Anemone dahlia with pink-white flowers; Latin dance (7)
7 Genus of bog arum … found in local Lakes (5)
8 Genus of the toad lily – casually cry "stir it" (9)
12 More mature (5)
15 Genus of some plants formerly *Scabiosa* – produces 'Salome' oil' (9)
17 Any plant of *Arum* family – very dry, nothing inside (5)
19 Another name for common yarrow – spreading oil film (7)
20 A series of *Coreopsis* plants … 'Origin of the Universe'? (3,4)
21 Plots illustrated by our magazine! (7)
23 Crab might precede this fruit (5)
26 Plant shoot grafted to stock for propagation (5)
29 See 7 across

• Solutions to this issue's crossword will be printed in the April issue

SOLUTIONS TO FEBRUARY CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Heligan **5** Garlic **8** Spur **9** Larva **10** Thug **11** Orlaya **12** Neillia **14** Acanthus **16** Rococo **18** Amelia **20** Milky Way **22** Mayleen **23** Antler **25** Isis **27** Heath **28** Noel **29** Crinum **30** African.

DOWN 1 Hypericum **2** Lorna **3** Goliath **4** Nerines **5** Glacier **6** Rot **7** Inula **13** Lucky **15/22** Nelly Moser **17** Chameleon **19** Anethum **20** Montana **21** Leather **24** Tunic **26** Sun.

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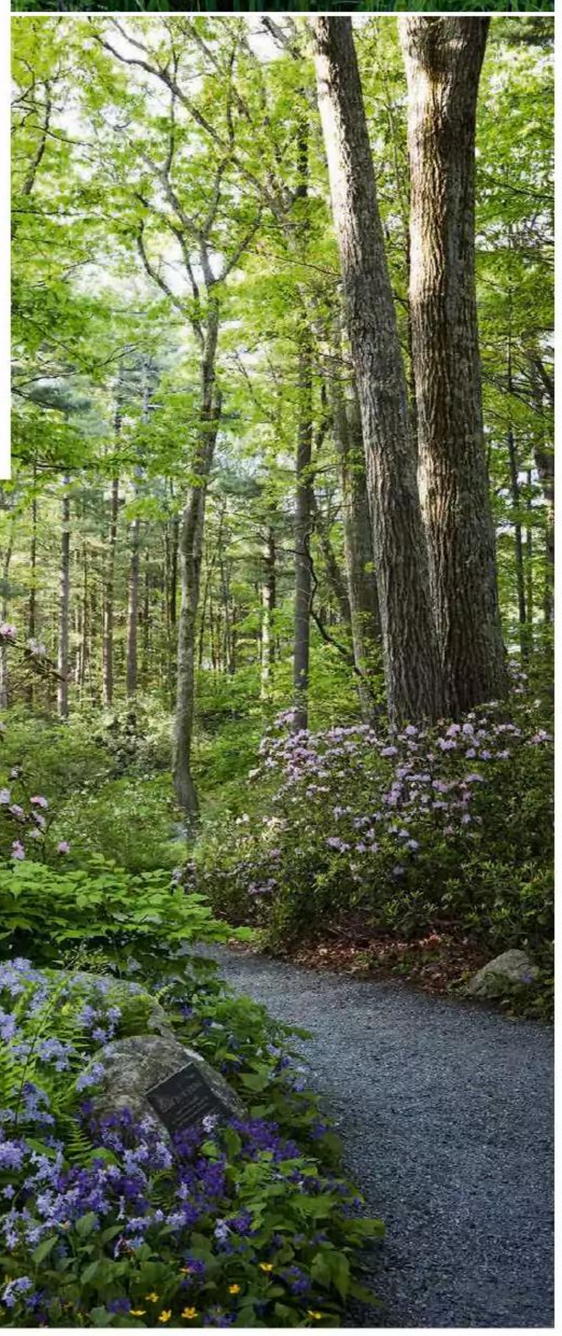


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Less, it turns out, is still more

Often, plans to transform our gardens fail because we try to do too much. Keep it simple, says designer **Jack Wallington**, and you can achieve far more

ILLUSTRATION **HANNAH PONTIN**

Some 68 per cent of British adults visit a garden centre each year with the hope of a brighter summer, according to the Horticultural Trades Association. We've all been there; filling the trolley with plants, and splurging our hard-earned cash and spare time on our gardens in a kind of start-of-season spring fervour.

Yet we are often left disappointed when things don't work out as imagined. The garden can't keep up with the ones we see in the glossy pages of garden magazines, like this one. To make life harder, the cost-of-living crisis has sent prices sky high, while the Met Office tells us the UK's climate is well on its way to winters up to 30 per cent wetter and summers up to 60 per cent drier. Never have we needed our gardens to deliver more.

But not every garden needs a radical transformation. Often the best makeovers come from a well-planned 'tweak'. Setbacks occur because it's hard to understand problems in our gardens, and when we buy from a nursery or garden centre on impulse, it leads to mistakes. Sometimes it's not our fault – not everything works, even for the pros – but we can learn and adapt.

If you were to make just one tweak to your garden this year, what would have the most impact? To make fewer, better-informed decisions, time spent researching is worth its weight in dahlias. Planning is where good design lies. I spend most of my time doing exactly this, carefully researching one or two additions with the power to elevate everything else.

Thankfully, changes in how and why we garden can make life easier. The big change is just to care less. 'Weeds and wildlife are our friends,' says the RHS, to cheers from many of us exhausted gardeners. And this approach is starting to bear fruit in helpful research. On the *Helenium* trial I recently judged at RHS Garden Bridgewater, we discovered that around three quarters of the 60 cultivars show natural slug resistance.

It must be said that caring less isn't not caring at all – we still want our gardens to be beautiful, productive places. Contemporary planting is naturalistic and ethereal, but its big secret is that it can be fairly simple.

Big sweeps or repeated blocks of the same plant deliver maximum impact for much less effort, bringing cohesion to even the most chaotic established garden. There's psychology behind this. We feel comfortable in spaces that are easily read, and repetition helps our brains make sense of what we see.

So rather than buying lots of different plants, consider reducing your choices down to one or two that work with your existing garden, and plant these en masse. Ten or 20 of the same plant dotted through a space create structure with serious wow factor. Perhaps you already have a plant that can be divided for free.

On the flip side to mass planting, a single large shrub or tree can provide enough of a focal point to do the same transformational job. Use either approach across the seasons, and you'll be on to a winner, especially if you research plants that have a long flowering window to keep colour going.

With a less predictable climate, weather tolerance is key, and we're all now looking for plants that can withstand drought in summer and wet in winter. Resilient plants are good for sustainability and create stable habitats for wildlife. Once established, they shouldn't need watering or feeding, making them easier to grow and increasing the chances of success.

If you're happy with your planting, but feel something is still missing, other tweaks to consider include adding or expanding a planting area, adjusting a path or introducing a large pot. Just one of these can change focal points and framing, altering everything.

Another thing to consider is garden furniture – the sculptural focal point none of us were aware we owned. Making the right choice for comfort and look is critical for making or breaking a garden. Pieces with clean lines in wood or metal contrast beautifully against complex modern planting.

One final design secret is knowing what to leave out. Perhaps the best tweak you can make is simply deciding which item or colour to remove to entirely transform the whole vibe of your space. □



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