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e info@gardenconfidential.co.uk
w gardenconfidential.co.uk

EDITORIAL

EDITOR

Melanie Wand
e editor@gardenconfidential.co.uk

ADVERTISING

DISPLAY & CLASSIFIED

e sales@gardenconfidential.co.uk
e classified@gardenconfidential.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

e subs@gardenconfidential.co.uk

DESIGN & PRODUCTION

ART DIRECTOR

Steve Brown
e steve@sbd.org.uk
e studio@gardenconfidential.co.uk
SBD on behalf of Garden Confidential
w sbd.org.uk

PRINT

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Headley Brothers
t 01233 623131
e printing@headley.co.uk
w headley.co.uk

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WE AT *Garden Confidential* are all quietly celebrating our second year – quite an achievement given the present economic uncertainties. However to combat that invasive weed, complacency, we have tweaked publication dates to allow us to concentrate on new themes albeit in the same season.

So this time we focus on late spring. First up that gorgeous herald of summer – the iris. Starting on page 6, we guide you through the

myriad of amazing iris varieties. Steve McCurdy of Majestic Trees turns our thoughts to flowering trees – not the spring blossom type but those marvellous characters that bloom in June like the *Liriodendron* pictured on page 30. Whilst Guy Pullen of Clifton Nurseries, on page 11, gives us some early pointers on how to plug those summer gaps without resorting to annuals.

With May appearing mid issue, how could we not mention The Chelsea Flower Show? Maybe we all struggle with the crowds but we would never miss that inspirational event. Jane Tocher of Country Greenhouses, who is exhibiting there this year, gives us her personal view on making the best of your day at Chelsea (see page 22). She is also offering us the chance to win a couple of tickets for the show. And there are more tickets on offer – Hatfield House are offering us Two For One for their Rose Weekend – check out page 36. Finally after all that hectic business, contemplate a little down-time in your own summerhouse – page 13 shows just how integral a summerhouse is to your garden.

Maybe it's just my son but it seems to me more and more people are keeping aquariums – so for a slightly different planting angle see page 44, where we asked Andy Gabbutt of Maidenhead Aquatics how to plant an aquarium. Meanwhile, Tim Webb from the RSPB on page 40 continues to inform us about wildlife in our gardens, and this time draws the line between good pests and the bad guys.

As garden lovers we all know – better to fund a hedge than a hedge fund – but these are difficult times. We at *Garden Confidential* are doing our bit – look out for our 'Confidential Saver' boxes this issue, with tips from the trade to help things go that bit further.

We are continuing to vary and widen our readership all the time with new distribution areas – but never our remit – which, we hope, remains functional, informative and inspirational.

Melanie Wand

Melanie Wand, Editor
e editor@gardenconfidential.co.uk



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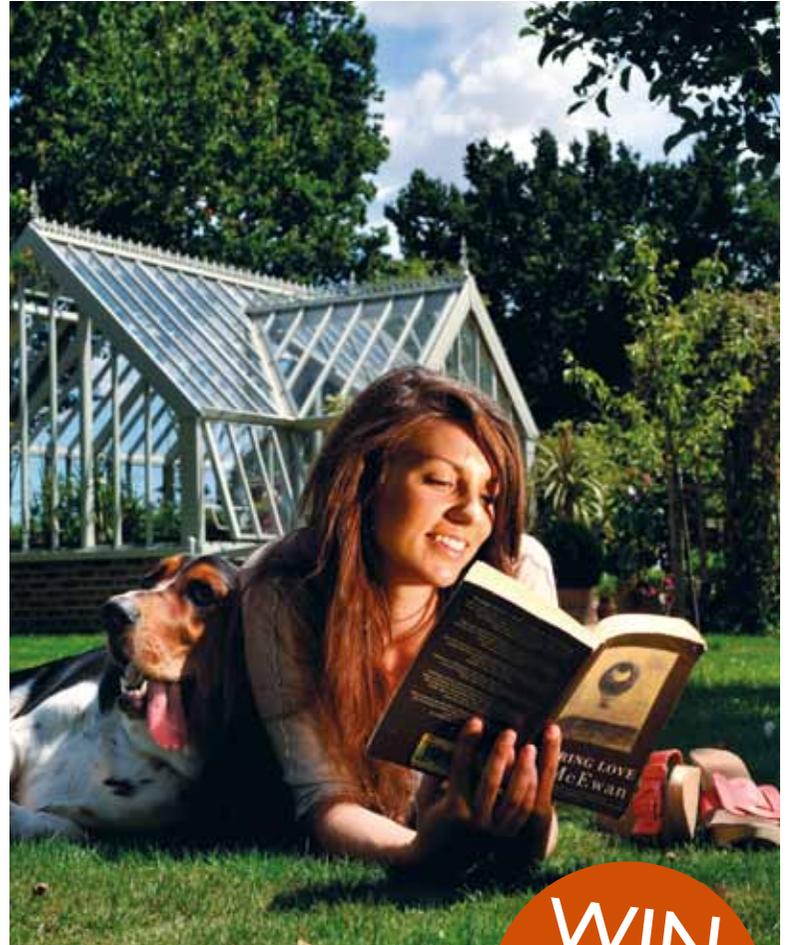
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THE
IRRESISTIBLE
RISE OF THE
IRIS

Melanie Wand investigates their enduring allure

GORGEOUS AND GLAMOROUS, the iris has always had its appeal. The Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau movements idealised the iris, comparing its erotic sensual qualities to the organic female form. The intricate, delicate lines of the iris' petals, overlapping and caressing, combined with exotic colours made the iris synonymous with the movements.

'No mixed English border was complete without a few flags'

Throughout the 20th century no mixed English border in May was complete without a few flags, as my mother called them. Perhaps in past years their popularity waned a little – a general complaint being that they take up a lot of room in the herbaceous border, yet only have a short flowering period of three weeks at most. However, their wonderful colour spectrum that spans from white to near black, encompassing cream to every hue of yellow, pink to aubergine and every tone of blue, has put them back in the designer pack. One need only check out the last couple of Chelsea shows to see evidence of this.



Paula Ryan's *Amnesty International Garden for Human Rights*, Chelsea 2007

This choice of colour makes the iris a very accommodating plant. It can be used in any number of effective ways. For example in this modernist courtyard above, the vivid yellow of the iris looks striking against the white rendered walls and aluminium planters.

In another totally different environment, as shown below in this naturalistic planting scheme, the range of earthy colours ensure that the iris does not detract from the natural feel of the long grass. At the same time the iris is still making a strong colour impact.



Laurent Perrier Garden, Chelsea 2007

In a more contrived prairie planting, a grass such as *Stipa tenuissima* with its tactile green clumps of foliage can be woven to great effect with a dark purple *Iris germanica* to create a textural contrast of transparency and solid mass as well as one of colour.



Andy Sturgeon's *The Cancer Research Garden*, Chelsea 2006

I, however, have a preference for planting iris in great swathes. A bold swash of colour can illuminate any bed – they are such a strong majestic plant.



A swathe of *Iris pallida*

And when they are finished flowering, their upright, strap-like glaucous architectural foliage to my mind offsets the short flowering period.



Foliage of *Iris pallida* 'Variegata' sweeps down the edge of this unusual water feature

Ultimately, never forget one's mum's maxim – there is nothing lovelier in May than that old cottage-style mix of iris, lupin and allium.



Cottage style planting employing a yellow and purple colour scheme

So yes, the huge colour palette, their adaptability to any setting – traditional to modernist – make the iris a plant of choice. But as with all plants, habitat and soil are serious considerations, and iris can be fussy. I have to admit that I have struggled for years with iris, never taking the trouble to fully examine their individual requirements. Hence for this *Garden Confidential* issue I decided to do a little research for my personal benefit as well as you *Garden Confidential* readers!

How to choose and care for your iris

TO MY SURPRISE, the overwhelming find was the size and diversity of the iris genus. And what makes the iris so wonderful is that the options available not only in colour, but in height, habitat and flowering times are so large that with careful planting one can find an iris to suit practically any situation.

To begin with there are two quite separate groups, Rhizomatous and Bulbous. That is, tuber-like and bulb. The flower heads are similar, although the bulbs do not quite produce the exotic heads of the rhizomes. Within these two groups there are several subdivisions, all equally distinct and all with individual requirements. And they do all have one wonderful feature in common and that is storage capacity. In times of extreme weather conditions, wet or dry, winter or summer they can retreat into their rhizomes or bulbs. What a boon, in these unpredictable times of climate change!

Rhizomatous Iris – Mum’s Flags



Bearded iris flower mid-spring to early-summer. The rhizomes need to be planted level with the soil surface, partially exposed and spaced between 30 and 40 centimetres apart. It is a good idea before planting to reduce the leaf fans by half and for those already planted to cut the foliage right back in late autumn. Do not mulch as it encourages rhizome rot.

They prefer well drained, fertile, neutral to slightly acid soil in full sun. They do not like to be shaded or crowded out by other plants. Sadly they will attract slugs and snails if your garden has a propensity for them and they are not great on clay soil.

Often referred to as *Iris germanica*, the choice is huge but here are three examples indicating the breadth of colour and height:

- ◆ *Action Front*; copper with mulberry; 75cm
- ◆ *Bold Print*; purple and white; 55cm
- ◆ *Queechee*; garnet and purple; 90cm



Iris germanica Queechee



Beardless iris flower mid- to late-spring. The major difference between these and bearded is that beardless are planted below the soil surface and do benefit from mulch. There are six different species but the most useful are *Iris sibirica* and *Iris Pacific Coast*. These are less finicky on all counts.

Iris sibirica

These prefer moist conditions and thrive on the margins of ponds in sun or partial shade. Three examples out of many indicating breadth of colour and height are:

- ◆ *Butter and Sugar*; white and yellow; 70cm
- ◆ *Eric the Red*; purple and burgundy; 90cm
- ◆ *Iris bulleyana*; violet and white; 45cm



Iris sibirica Butter and Sugar

Iris Pacific Coast

These tend to be evergreen and not so tall. They like sandy, leaf littered soil in dappled shade. Three examples again indicating breadth of colour and height are:

- ◆ *Banbury Beauty*; blue with purple; 55cm
- ◆ *Blue Ballerina*; white violet flash and black markings; 40cm
- ◆ *Broadleigh Rose*; pink; 40cm



Iris Pacific Coast Blue Ballerina

Bulbous Iris

These are bulbs and need to be planted at a depth twice the height of the actual bulb. There are three different groups that between them extend the flowering season from winter to mid-summer, varying in height and colour nearly as much as the rhizomes. They all prefer full sun and well-drained, neutral to slightly alkaline soil. But I have found that they do well on my clay soil!

Iris reticulata

Flowering from winter to early-spring, they tend to be small, so are ideal for rock gardens or front edgers. As they flower so early, do plant them near your window to appreciate them on a cold morning when you're not yet venturing outside.

- ◆ *Harmony*; royal blue; 15cm



Iris reticulata Harmony

Iris Juno

Iris Juno come into flower in early-spring, and tend to be of medium height in the bulb range.

- ◆ *Warland*; blue and yellow; 30cm

Iris Xiphium

Flowering mid-spring to mid-summer, these tend to be the tallest.

- ◆ *White Wedgewood*; white and yellow; 65cm

THIS IS BY no means an exhaustive list. There are another four species of beardless iris, crested iris and several variations of bearded. And within the groups the choice of cultivars is endless. They all have plenty of lovely reasons for you to go and check them out! ■

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After three to five years the rhizomes of *Iris germanica* benefit from being lifted and divided.

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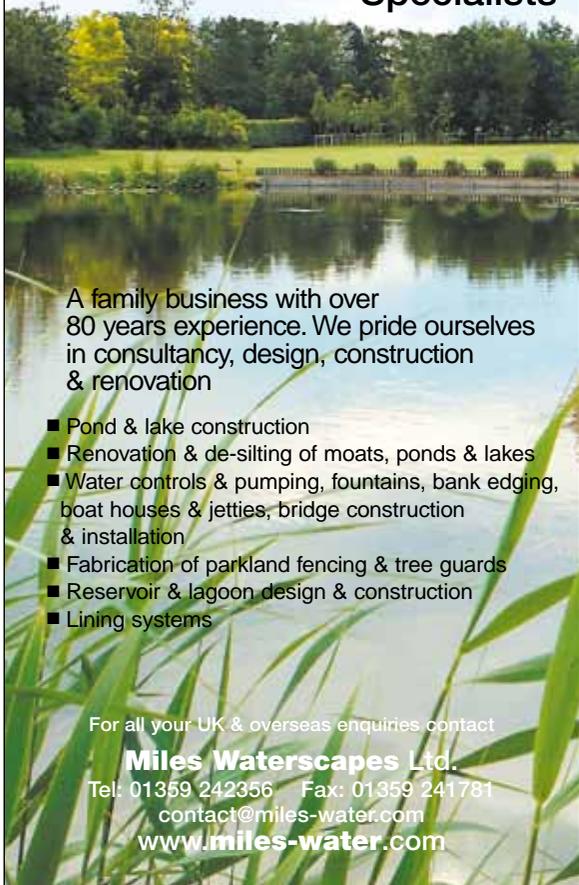
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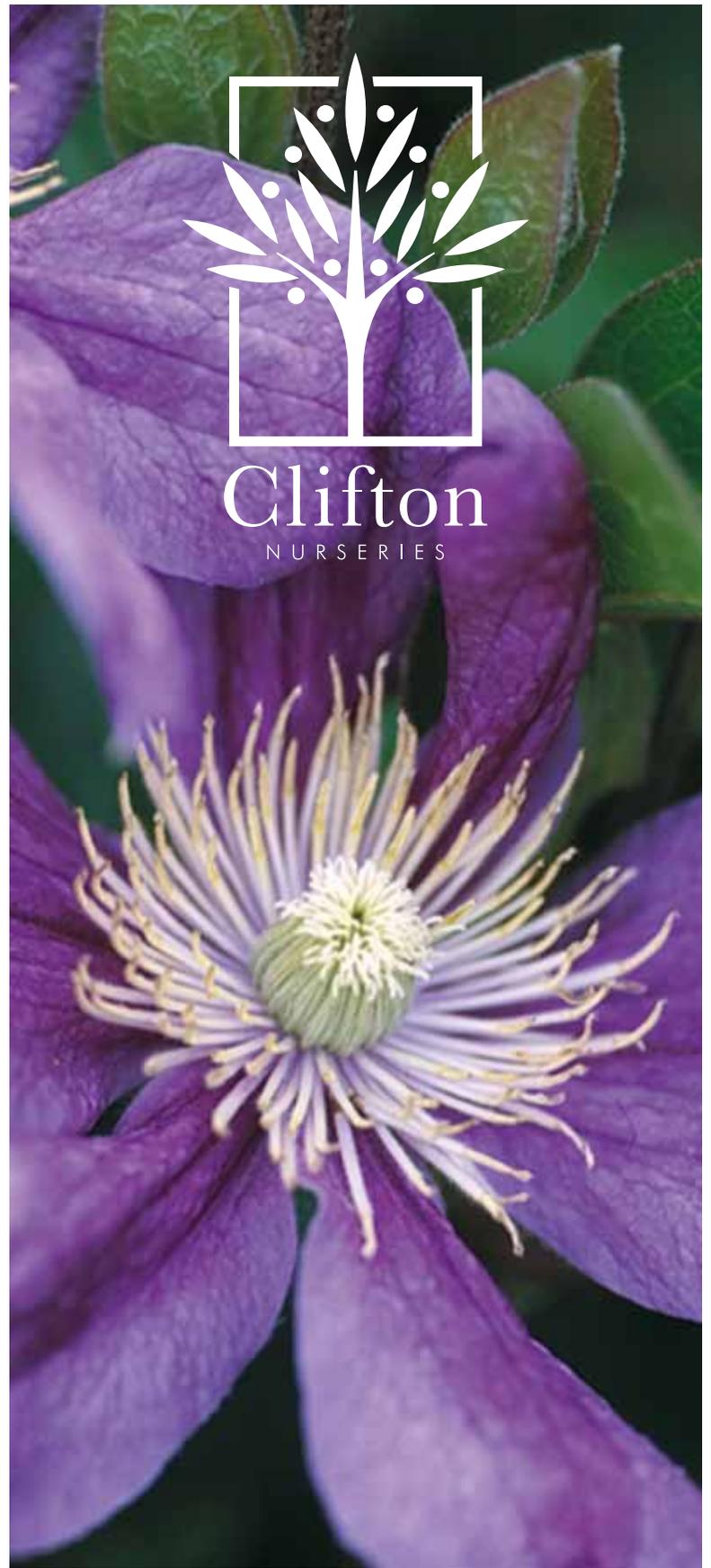
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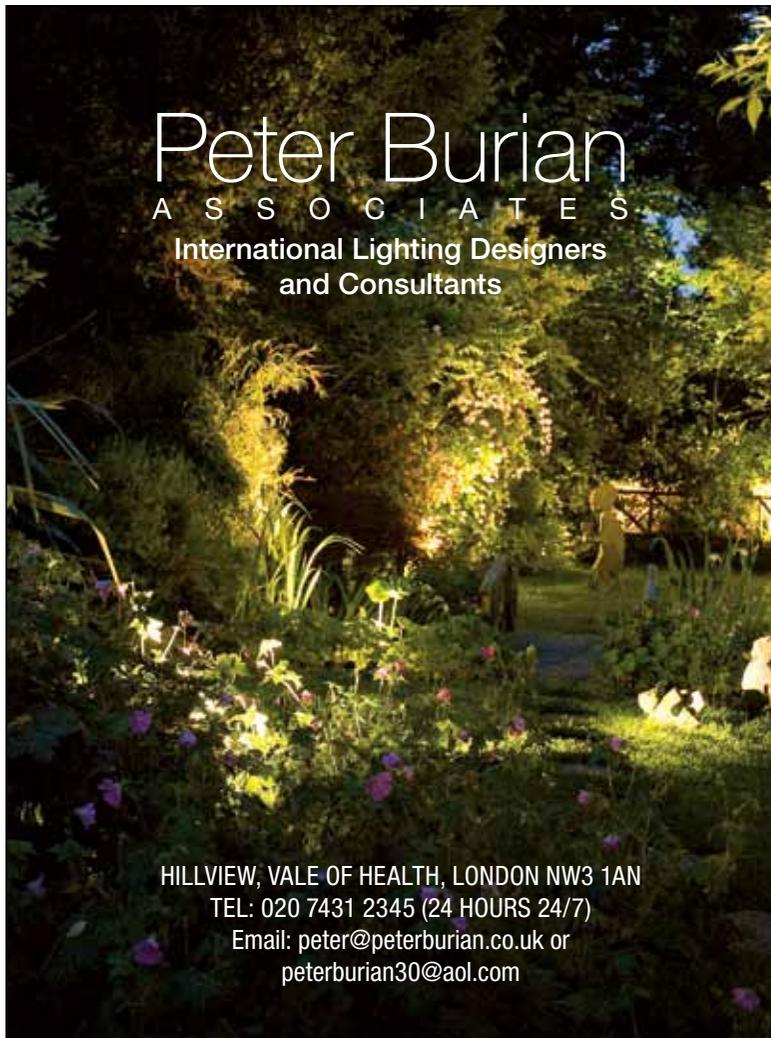


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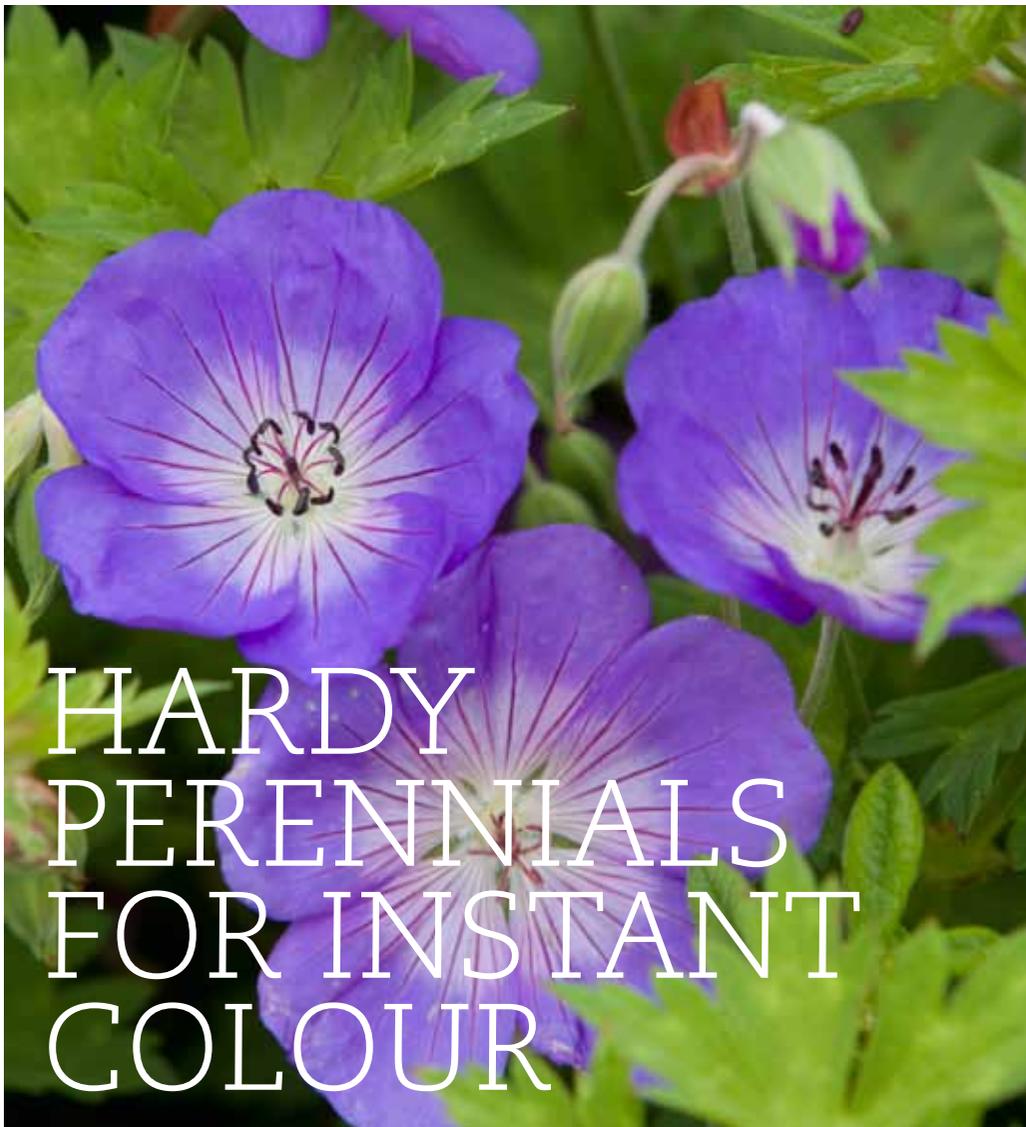


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Clockwise from left: Geranium *Jolly Bee*, Erysimum *Bowles Mauve* and Erigeron *karvinskianus Profusion*

HARDY PERENNIALS FOR INSTANT COLOUR

At this time of the year it's all too easy to rush out and buy annuals to fill those gaps, but there are many perennials that do the job just as well. **Guy Pullen** of Clifton Nurseries chooses some of his personal favourites.

BEDDING IS BORING. It may be clichéd garden snobbery, but all those stiff little forms in their rigid uniformity are the antithesis of my gardening idyll. I want to see plants billowing over paths and pots overflowing with flower and foliage. I want to hear bees bothering blooms and I want the thrush to find the snail sheltering under the twisted stalks of a long loved plant.

I am unlikely to get all that with bedding, but I concede that for a long season of bright colour, seasonal plants are hard to beat. Luckily there are a few herbaceous stars whose long seasons of bright colour enable them to bridge the gap between punchy annuals and steadfast perennials. Geranium *Jolly Bee* (syn. *Rozanne*) is a prime example. Like many Geraniums, *Jolly Bee* is great for plugging gaps, softening edges and filling rustic pots, but the great thing about it is its longevity of flowering.

In the drab old summer of 2008 my *Jolly Bee* Geranium produced its wide blue saucers of flower from May to October – a great plant that

is hamstrung only by its name.

Luckily *Erysimum Bowles Mauve* has no such problems. This tough perennial has dusky green leaves and is smothered with spikes of purple and mauve flowers from one end of the year to the next. Unlike its overly cultivated cousins the wallflowers, *Erysimum Bowles Mauve* has an air of wild beauty about it and its rambling nature is much prized in my garden where they have been flowering non-stop since the cold day I planted them in March '07 – and long may they continue!

Outside of London and the South West this next plant is often considered to be an annual, but in our warmer climes the *Osteospermum* goes right through all but the toughest winters. Cape Daisies – as they also known – have rubbery, almost succulent evergreen leaves that betray their South African roots and this allows them to pluck goodness out of the most dry and barren plots. The *Osteospermum*'s creeping frame holds up bright daisy-shaped flowers that come in a

kaleidoscope of colours and will give any pot, well drained bed or sunny wall a tropical lift.

Lastly, as a permanent replacement for *Felicia*, *Diascia* and the like, try *Erigeron karvinskianus Profusion*. Delicate pink and white daisy flowers are perched on quaking stems, but don't be fooled; this plant is as tough as they come. Planted in a pot or basket, *E. Profusion* will drape gracefully and flower all summer long. Planted in a border, its little mist of flowers will set seed and find nooks and gaps you didn't know you had. ■

Guy Pullen can be contacted at Clifton Nurseries on 020 7289 6851

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A SHED FOR ALL SEASONS

Melanie Wand sheds light on the English Summerhouse

A shady retreat

IT'S THAT TIME of year again when we lug our garden furniture from basement, from under the stairs, or from behind the lawnmower under the shovel in the shed. Why, we ask ourselves, don't we keep it all in the garden, somewhere easily accessible, not to mention, clean? *Space* – we shout. No one wants a yet larger eyesore of a shed. However, once out, the maxim – don't let's worry till the autumn – is not the way forward. A

far better solution is to consider a summerhouse.

In past issues we have discussed the merits of patios, conservatories and greenhouses neglecting this essential garden edifice. The summerhouse is probably the most versatile building one can put in the garden. Whereas a shed serves no purpose other than storage, the summerhouse can be all things to all men.

As a designer I find that the summerhouse

is one of the most desirable structures one can place in a garden. Initially as a focal point I might use it to create a vista for a path going nowhere, or as a device to appear to widen a long narrow urban garden. It is equally valuable, enticing you to a little quiet time under some trees or screening next door's hideous *Cupressus leylandii*. Anyway it acts as a staging post for both body and eye to rest upon. ►



GAP PHOTOS/ELKE BORKOWSKI DESIGN: ZINSSER GMBH

Summerhouse in the evening



GAP PHOTOS/SARAH CUTLER DESIGN: DAVID CLIBRO AND JAMES WONG

Create your own sanctuary

I understand that most clients these days don't want to spend money unnecessarily on simply decorative additions to the garden – function is all important. And it is here that the summerhouse really comes into its own. Foremost they add an extra bit of living space. They really are that spare room we all crave. And they can function as anything you want. They make for a wonderful garden office. I have also seen them used very successfully as gyms. In winter when you are not using them for entertaining they make great playhouses for

the kids and in spring provide an excellent spot for your seedlings.

As an added bonus, generally no planning permission is required, provided the summerhouse is not more than ten cubic metres in volume and no higher than three metres high, with the proviso that it is situated more than five metres away from your house. And as they stand alone, this means when it comes to construction – unlike the conservatory – they can be built without the builders coming into the house!

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The 19th century Swiss Cottage in the Swiss Garden seated on its mound of daffodils

History of the Summerhouse

FROM THE MID 16th century onwards the summerhouse became the must-have feature in all the large Tudor estates. Often sited on a mount overlooking an ornamental lake, they featured not only as focal points but also as areas in which to entertain. They were referred to both as summerhouses and banqueting houses – no distinction was drawn between them. Often built with two storeys, there could be a kitchen as well as a dining area. There are contemporary references to summerhouses in Nonsuch Palace, Hampton Court and the Earl of Leicester's Kenilworth Castle, where he liked to entertain Elizabeth I. Cosy areas away from the main house made them conducive to intimate parties!

By the mid 17th century people were coming to the realisation that the summerhouse could be used for other purposes as well. John Rea, a well-known plantsman and author, mentions using his "handsome Somer-house... not only for delight and entertainments... but also for many other necessary arrangements" such as storing the tulips over the winter. John Evelyn, the famous diarist, built his summerhouse over a cascade as a study in which to pass his melancholy hours.

The 18th century saw the summerhouse become increasingly grand and referred to as The Pavilion. There is a beautiful example of one at the restored Wrest Park in Bedfordshire. Here this ornate and complex building has bedrooms, kitchens and a two-seater privy! As the 18th century drew on the rage for Chinoiserie and all things



GAP PHOTOS/JONATHAN NEED



GAP PHOTOS/JULIETTE WADE



GAP PHOTOS

Clockwise from top left: a relaxing focal point; playtime on the porch of a painted Wendy house; enjoy unrestricted views through the open sides of this Pavilion-type summerhouse

associated saw summerhouses built as oriental tea houses.

In the 19th century an extraordinary phenomenon took place. With so many people now travelling abroad, a vogue for Alpine scenery seized our nation. So, imposed on the picturesque landscapes of the Regency period came the Swiss chalet. It is sad that the Swiss chalet developed such a bad name in the 1960s, because their 19th century forebears were very pretty. Often thatched and with a rustic wooden porch they made for very charming summerhouses. There is a wonderful Regency period garden – open to the public – known as The Swiss Garden, near Biggleswade in Bedfordshire. Built by Lord Longley in 1820 for his Swiss mistress, it contains not only an authentic Regency Swiss cottage but also many other lovely period garden structures.

The 20th century saw yet further innovations for the summerhouse. In the 1920s with the rage for Naturalism – healthy living and sun worshipping – the revolving summerhouse was introduced. It was designed so that one could catch the sun as it moved overhead.

In the 1960s it was all about log cabins, but perhaps the less said about that the better!

And today, the cutting edge summerhouse should feature a green living roof of course.

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'ALLO 'ALLO

Allotmenting is all the rage and **Tom Cole** says “Persevere – it’s worth the wait”

IT USED TO be the case that wherever I looked there seemed to be countless ‘gardening’ areas left abandoned, where once they were the heart of communities producing their own produce. In some cases this is still very true, in others the trend is very much about getting outside and toiling the land. Are you aware that there are so many Local Authorities almost willing you, the gardener, to take up these areas? Now, before you run out of the house, screaming it’s all too much, vowing never to wield a spade again, why not have a re-think? What could be more satisfying than producing your own salads and veg?

Since the 1970’s there has been a great upsurge in vegetable growing, simply because of inflation and rising prices. Hmm... something we read regularly these days!

In Britain and other parts of Europe, those without gardens often make use of allotments on plots assigned by the local government. Throughout the 70’s and 80’s virtually all the allotments in Britain had been taken up. However, looking around these days there seems to be a steady decline in a few areas, but I’m glad



Knee-deep in veg

to read and see the trend is very much changing. If, though, you have a limited garden and wish to experiment with growing – and by the way, growing doesn’t have to be vegetables, it could be flowers or even herbs, whatever grabs your fancy – it is worth checking with your local council for plots. A number have allotment schemes, some allowing you to use the allotment free for a year and access to free manure. Well, with an offer like that you’d be insane to ignore it.

If anything, when you have finished reading

this and you are interested in ‘allotmenting’, why not contact your Local Authority for an allotment group near you, and who knows, very shortly you could be eating your very first batch of spring/summer vegetables and salads?

I have to say that you may have to wait a while as some areas do have a waiting list. But persevere – it’s worth the wait. Many of my friends and also students from the College have taken the plunge this year and I have to say that all have been very productive and successful. And what could be better than hand picking, ready for the table, something that you have nurtured from seed? Better still, involve your kids, they’ll just love getting stuck in.

Allotments are communities, and whether you are a complete novice or ardent gardener, my experience is that everyone helps each other in producing the perfect crop. So why not, this spring, contact your local group and help keep allotments part of the landscape? I did... and I’m loving it. ■

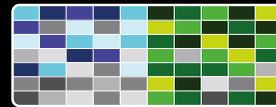
Tom Cole is Head of School of Horticulture, Capel Manor College, Bullsmoor Lane, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 4RQ; telephone 08456 122122; e-mail enquiries@capel.ac.uk; web www.capel.ac.uk



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Simply sensational, but rather high maintenance. Iris, though instantly attractive, doesn't always have lasting looks. However, partner it well and check out its foliage, and it will always play a strong part in the heart of your herbaceous borders.

IMAGES: ANDREW LAWSON



▲ Allium 'Purple Sensation' and Iris 'Jane Phillips' make a marvellous double act



▲ Bearded Iris 'Kent Pride' moves in for a choice assignation with Verbascum 'Cotswold Queen'



▲ Check out those leaves on Iris variegata and underpin them with Meconopsis cambrica



▲ Swoon to this purple medley of iris, geranium and aquilegia

Compiled with help from Andrew Lawson Photographic Library. Plants stocked at **Clifton Nurseries**, 5A Clifton Villas, London W9 2PH. Tel: 020 7289 6851; e-mail: enquiry@clifton.co.uk
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Mixed grasses and perennials give a wonderful, natural feel to the planting and looks stunning in winter too

GARDENS FOR LIFE

ANTONY HENN AND his team at GardensForLife have been designing, creating and maintaining gardens in and around London since 1995.

Most of their planting and maintenance work is based around North London and Hertfordshire, headed by eminent garden and planting designer Eloise Walduck.

Antony's enthusiasm for plants and gardens has taken him around the world on some amazing adventures. He has also presented many gardening programmes and can now be heard with his brother Alex answering gardening questions on BBC Three Counties radio.

This year has started well with the top award for planting design awarded to GardensForLife by the Association of Professional Landscapers.



Stipa arundinacea is used here as an edge to the path, with nepeta (catmint) and alliums to compliment



Persicaria, planted here with ornamental grasses, is one of our favourite perennials as it flowers for ages and looks as good in the winter



We used various perennials, grasses and shrubs, to give a variation of texture as well as year-round colour



Before we started the garden, it had great potential but had not a single plant in it!

The Design

The clients were keen to have a creative garden with year-round interest and medium maintenance. The overall look they wanted was stylish/modern classic with a large lawn area.

We created a garden which combines the evergreen formal structured planting with an informal flowing natural look, using grasses and perennials.

Our ideas on the planting were to create a feeling of continuity, movement and flow with strong sweeping borders with areas that naturally lead you into another zone and surprises are around every curve.

The whole of the rear garden now flows beautifully with hidden areas and different colour schemes, depending on the time of year.

Once the design was finished and agreed,

the costs for creating the new garden were accepted and works began. The most important job when developing any garden is getting the soil prepared correctly so that the new plants get the best start possible.

The borders were edged in pressure-treated timber to keep the edge crisp and easier to mow.

Services

The first step to any new project is a consultation. This is where we visit the garden and discuss any issues you have and learn more about your dreams and aspirations for the garden and assess your budget. Here we also give costs for design and discuss other services.

The design is crucial to any garden, be it traditional, contemporary or naturalistic. We never force our ideas onto the client but work

with them closely to come up with the ideal scheme.

GardensForLife work with APL registered landscaping companies who we obtain quotes from on our clients' behalf. The client is of course free to obtain their own quotations for comparison if they wish.

Planting is always costed and carried out by our own team with year-round colour and easy maintenance a priority.

We have a skilled maintenance team that can carry out weekly or seasonal maintenance for our clients so that we can maintain and develop your garden. ■

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CHECK OUT CHELSEA

Garden Confidential presents your user-friendly guide to this year's Chelsea Flower Show. By **Jane Tocher**.

HOW LONG IS it since you have been to Chelsea Flower Show? Have you ever been?

Perhaps this is the year to go and see what all the fuss is about? The number of firms sponsoring show gardens may have dropped from last year's all-time high, but the difference will be unnoticeable at the world's most famous flower show. Around 157,000 visitors will flock to the 11 acre site over five days in May to see the result of what can be 15 months' work showing off the very best and most colourful in plants and gardening.

This will be the 87th Show to be held in the grounds of the Royal Hospital since the 1930s and it is a wonderful mixture of the traditional and the innovative. More than 400 plants have been launched at shows over the years and the decades



DAN ENOCH

Opposite page: A Chelsea pensioner rings the bell signalling the end of the show and the start of the 'Sell-Off'
 Above: Lilies galore in The Great Pavilion, 2008
 Below Right: Discover new trends, Gavin Jones Garden of Corina in association with Philip Nash, 2008

span enormous changes in the way people approach gardening. The show both reflects and creates trends whilst delighting and exciting the professional, the amateur and the spectator.

If you are new to Chelsea, or have been put off in the past by the crowds, I would say decide beforehand what will give you the most pleasure at the show, and plan your day around that. Order a catalogue in advance and plot your route – with a cup of coffee planned in. If possible, go early. The show opens each day at 8:00am so this gives you time to look around and be away before the crowds build up.

The most popular feature is the Great Pavilion where 110 floral displays will be the centrepiece of the show with their sights, smells and vibrant colours. But I prefer wandering around the Show

Gardens – there will be a total of 40 this year, around half of which are small courtyard and urban gardens to give you ideas for your garden as well as pleasure.

If you are planning a major garden investment, Chelsea is the ideal place to look around one of the 300 garden product exhibitors. Here you will find the best of everything for your garden from greenhouses and conservatories to garden implements and the newest trends in making the most of your garden space.

Chelsea 'Sell-Off'

Finally, if you plan to be there on the Saturday afternoon, you can buy from the stalls and exhibits between 4:00 and 5:30pm. Pick up some amazing bargains to take home. ▶



DAN ENOCH



Above: Iris *Broadleigh Fenella* is among several new iris cultivars being featured this year at Chelsea
 Right: A host of daffodils in the Great Pavilion, 2008



JON ENOCH

Suggestions

- ◆ Arrive early to enjoy the show before visitor numbers peak – doors open at 8:00am.
- ◆ Buy a show catalogue to plan your day and what you want to see – catalogues cost £5 (plus £1.50 p&p in advance). Use the map in the show catalogue to plan your visit.

Getting to the show

- ◆ There are two entrances, one off Chelsea Embankment, the other on Royal Hospital Road
- ◆ Sloane Square station (on the District and Circle lines) is a ten minute walk from the Showground.
- ◆ London General operates a special bus service between Victoria Train Station and the Chelsea Flower Show from 7:00am until 8:00pm each day (6:00pm on Saturday).
- ◆ Bus numbers 11, 137, 211, 239, 360 and 452 stop closest to the Showground, while numbers 19, 22, 319 and C1 stop at Sloane Square.
- ◆ Public parking (including spaces for orange/blue badge holders) is available in Battersea Park on a first come, first served basis.

Battersea Park is approximately 25 minutes walk from the show. There are over 2,000 parking spaces available Tuesday to Friday and 500 spaces available on Saturday in designated car parks only.

- ◆ 50 manual wheelchairs are available to book in advance. To book a wheelchair, call 0845 260 7000 (bookings close on 15 May 2009). Attendants cannot be provided, but one companion is admitted free of charge per wheelchair user, visually impaired visitor or other person whose disability necessitates a carer. ■

The RHS Chelsea Flower Show runs from Tuesday 19 May until Saturday 23 May. Tuesday to Friday: 8:00am – 8:00pm (Tuesday and Wednesday are Members Only days). Saturday: 8:00am – 5:30pm. Further information from www.rhs.org.uk/whats_on/shows/chelsea2009
 Entrance prices on Public days Thursday and Friday 8:00am – 8:00pm and Saturday 8:00am – 5:30pm £43. Thursday and Friday entrance 3:30pm – 8:00pm £24 and 5:30pm – 8:00pm £18.50.

Jane Tocher is a director of Country Greenhouses who have won stand awards at Chelsea in 2007 and 2008. This year Country Greenhouses have a large stand on the corner of Royal Hospital Way and Western Avenue at RHW/51 where they will be showing two different styles of greenhouses as well as launching a new glazed pergola and showing Victorian plant supports in a garden planting scheme specially designed by horticulturist Phil Gamble, www.philip-gamble.co.uk

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HELMINGHAM HALL

Melanie Wand takes a day out in the country and visits Helmingham Hall Gardens in Suffolk

Helmingham Hall – still protected by its moat

I HAD THE pleasure on behalf of *Garden Confidential* to revisit Helmingham Hall – one of my favourite English gardens – on a chilly day in February. Despite gloomy skies the last twenty minutes were a delight. Rolling Suffolk countryside, hamlets that still boast a village Post Office and stores and pretty thatched cottages painted ‘Suffolk Pink’.

Historic landscapes come no more quintessential than at Helmingham Hall; a moated manor house complete with drawbridge set in ten acres of formal and semi-formal gardens surrounded by an ancient Deer Park. And all this in oft-overlooked Suffolk.

On driving through the formidable gates to the house, I was delighted once again to be greeted by this beautiful red-bricked edifice not to mention the deer who were looking particularly majestic. The stags being in their full winter antler finery.

Although the house is not open to the public, I cannot resist writing a little about it, as it is so fascinating. Privately-owned, it has been in the hands of the same family, the Tollemaches,

since 1487. In 1510 it was completely rebuilt by John Tollemache and although there have been a number of exterior changes made to the house since then, the basic Tudor format of courtyard manor and brick chimneys is still there. The two drawbridges are in full working order and indeed are pulled up every night as they have been since 1510!



Both red and fallow deer roam the 400 acres of the park

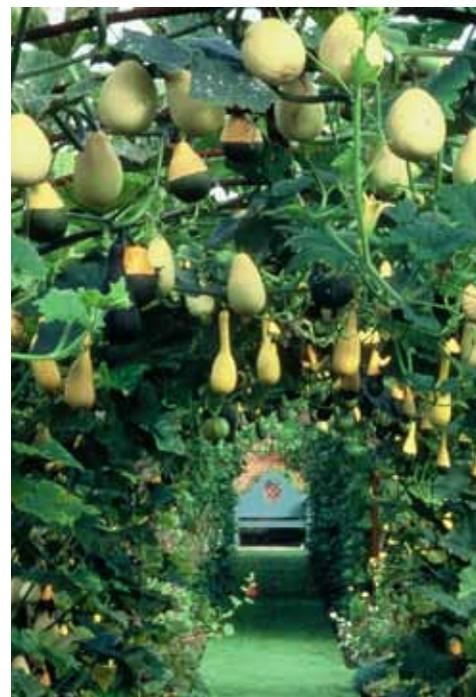
I think that this is the reason I am so charmed by Helmingham Hall – it is a home that, although stately, has an air of warmth and hospitality – perhaps because unlike so many other houses of this stature, it is inhabited. And the same is true of the gardens: although open to the public, they are a family concern.

‘It is a personal garden – not a National Trust property’

Gardens of the quality of Helmingham Hall do not happen lightly. They do not take care of themselves. They need to be loved and nurtured. I was concerned that they would not be as wonderful as I had remembered, but I need not have worried. Lady Tollemache, in the company of her dogs and Roy the Head Gardener, walk the gardens every day, noting, revising, re-evaluating. I can vouch for this, as on arrival I found them all in the garden! Between them they keep these gardens alive, gorgeous and immaculate. ▶



The herbaceous border in the Kitchen Garden



The Gourd Tunnel

THE GARDENS

There are no original plans of the garden but one feels the gardens were always there. This is due entirely to the sensitive recreation of the gardens that has been in steady progress for the last fifty years. Lady Dinah Tollemache, the present Lord's mother, was keen on roses. She put in place some beautiful hybrid musk roses down the length of the west wall of the Kitchen Garden. Xa, the present Lady Tollemache, is a landscape gardener in her own right. She has now brought her distinctive style and influence to bear throughout the garden.

Throughout, the gardens are carefully colour coordinated. In late-spring, pastels are chosen to blend with the old roses. In summer, the colour scheme deepens as the bronze and the deep reds and yellows of the later flowering perennials take over. Xa's colour of the moment is orange. She introduces splashes of this colour and others with dot planting of dahlias and other annuals to prolong the flowering season of the herbaceous borders. This ensures colour coverage well into late-summer. Many of the annuals are home grown – Lady Tollemache is a firm believer in growing your own.

The Kitchen Garden and Parterre

Before walking through the gates to the Kitchen Garden, one is waylaid by the Parterre. This was redesigned in 1978 by Xa – her first foray into design. In keeping with a Tudor feel there is formality but also intimacy: it is an extension

of the house of which one is aware, in the background, all the time. The traditional planting of dark green box hedging is offset with the infill of the grey *Santolina incana*. Even in winter it is a delight but in summer the two round beds surrounding stone urns are planted with annuals to add colour to the whole scene.



The Parterre

An original feature of the garden is the wall to the Kitchen Garden. Kitchen gardens are quite the vogue now but Helmingham Hall has been overseeing theirs for far longer. Stunning herbaceous borders are a highlight of these gardens in May and June. Flanking the borders, trained on wires, are a mixture of heavenly climbing roses – a medley of all my favourites – *Albertine*, *New Dawn*, *Adelaide d'Orleans*, *The Garland*, *Felicité et Perpetué*, *Mme Isaac Pereire* and plenty more. It is behind these that the splendid rows of vegetables are grown. Make no mistake – this is a veritable working kitchen garden. Row upon tailored row of vegetables to drool over –

they are Roy's pride and joy.

In 1986, Xa created the grass walks and arched tunnels clad with sweet peas, runner beans and gourds. These add an extra dimension to the area and allow for easy access both to the gardeners and viewing public alike. A personal touch never far away at Helmingham is the quirky topiary and Xa's individual potagers which abut the walls.



The Spring Border

The Spring Border

As this issue of *Garden Confidential* is all about Iris, make your way in late May to the south side of the Kitchen Garden. Here, lying in wait for you is a fantastic selection of beautiful iris set off with peonies, roses, valerian and honeysuckle – 'Oh to be in England, now!'



The Knot and Rose Garden

Apple Walk, Wild Flower and Orchard Garden

Spanning the length of the Kitchen Garden, on the north-facing side, is an avenue of lovely old apple trees leading to a rather private spot – the graveyard for the Tollemache dogs.

Moving on from this rather melancholy spot, mown paths make a walkway through the wild flowers and long grass of the Orchard area: a lovely contrast to the formality of the Kitchen Garden.

The Knot and Rose Garden

On the East side of the house below the mounted walk lies the Knot and Rose Garden. Lady Tollemache asked Lady Salisbury of Hatfield House, the 'Queen of Knot Gardens', to come and help with the design. It is a perfect example of that symmetrical relationship with the house that the Tudors excelled in.

'Its all about the right scale and proportion'

Two of the four squares show the pattern of the Tollemache fret and two show the family initials A and T. The interstices contain plants introduced into Britain before 1750. Extending from the Knots are Xa's particular pleasure – her Rose Garden. Full of gorgeous, divine Damask, Moss and Bourbon species it smells as good as looks.

Look out for the frames that Xa has devised

on which to pin these difficult roses. I bought one and recommend them.

The Coach House Garden – Exclusive to May



Now you can visit the Coach House Garden

This formerly private area is now open to the public, although only in May. Lady Tollemache has been developing this area for a while, but only now is it ready for the public to see. It is a pretty woodland setting with a meandering path around the pond. The new plantings include a selection of contemporary grasses and perennials and also some unusual shrubs and trees. Look out for the yellow Iris pseudacorus. They are in abundance here.

To make the most of your day out, I recommend finally a stroll up to the church. It is the family's church dating back to 1300 and filled with interesting memorials to various

generations of Tollemache. The rectory next to it, although not open to the public, is another beautiful 17th century home where John Constable lived for some time. He painted *A Dell in Helmingham Park* whilst there and the oak tree in the painting is still standing in the park.

Whatever time you decide to go and visit – and visit you must – I can assure that you will have been jolly pleased to have taken a day out in the country. ■

At the Helmingham Tea Rooms, Sally Abbott has devised a 'traditional with a twist' menu, offering a perfect range of salads, sandwiches and teatime treats. The ingredients are locally sourced, and refreshments are served in the estate's elegant and relaxing Coach House. Bookings can be made by calling 0845 8732021 or e-mail coachhouse@helmingham.com. The Gardens are open from Sunday 3 May until 13 September. During May and September, they are open every Sunday and Wednesday from 2:00pm–6:00pm, including Bank Holiday Monday 25 May. During June, July and August the Gardens are open every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday from 2:00pm–6:00pm, including Bank Holiday Monday 31 August.

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SUMMER FLOWERING TREES

Styax japonica flowers profusely in early summer



A specimen *Stryax japonica* in full bloom shown here as a large multi-stem

Everyone thinks of spring as the season when trees put on their most colourful and fragrant flowering displays, but there are a few fantastic trees that bloom in the summer.

By Steve McCurdy.

A GOOGLE SEARCH for summer flowering trees, or a trawl through the garden press will certainly leave you feeling spoilt for choice – but do beware! As an experienced nurseryman I must confess my frustration with some ‘armchair’ garden journalists who, in their desire to suggest something unique and unusual, unwittingly recommend trees that are virtually impossible to find, are difficult to grow, or can only be obtained as a tiny whip through the post. If you can find it and are happy to nurture it for ten to forty years, then ‘yes’, theoretically, it could resemble the tree you dreamed of.

If a nurseryman is not willing to invest in growing a ‘spectacular’ variety, it is often because the tree is a poor performer

For the majority of readers, however, I can’t help but think it would be far more helpful to promote lesser-known trees which can be widely obtained at reasonable sizes from reputable nurseries. This is not just a self-serving notion. Think about it: if a nurseryman is not willing to invest in growing a ‘spectacular’ variety, it

is often because the tree, in practice, is a poor performer. It may have a high failure rate in our climate, may be susceptible to diseases such as fireblight, or just be a weak grower, lacking in vitality. Fortunately, there is really no need to resort to obscurity to find a beautiful summer flowering tree. There are plenty of unusual, little-known summer flowering trees which are well suited to our climate and widely available at good commercial nurseries.

In my travels, I have seen some wonderful specimen trees all over Europe, and each year I find beautiful mature trees to grow-on at our nursery. In doing this I have discovered many unusual trees and been able to observe their performance in our climate. So what summer flowering trees would I recommend? Well, top of the list is *Styax japonica*, otherwise known as the Japanese Snowbell, which is a very beautiful, small tree or large shrub which has showers of white, bell-shaped flowers coating the undersides of the branches, typically in late June. This tree – which comes from the Far East – needs a fair amount of sun and moisture to flower profusely, but is relatively easy to grow and rarely exceeds six to eight metres when fully mature. The foliage is a rich, glossy green which turns yellow or red in the autumn. *Styax* is best planted in an elevated position so that the flowers can be admired from below.



The *Catalpa bignonioides Aurea* shown on the right, pops out of the landscape, whilst a *Gleditsia tr. Sunburst* on the left shows off its striking foliage. Inset: The *Catalpa*'s lovely flowers turn into long, pendulous snake-like pods



The *Liriodendron tulipifera* needs a large garden, but produces a beautiful and unusual tulip shaped flower (inset)

A second is *Catalpa bignonioides*, and especially variety *Catalpa bignonioides Aurea*. Whilst it has a short season in our climate, *Catalpa bignonioides Aurea* makes a dramatic, exotic-looking tree and quickly reaches its maximum height of twelve to 15 metres, although this can be conveniently reduced through pruning. (Smaller *Nana* varieties are available).

Catalpa bignonioides Aurea is a wide-spreading tree, that needs good light, is easy to maintain and is not particularly fussy about its soil

Don't expect to see any leaves until late spring once the temperatures have risen, then enjoy its bright yellow leaves that do slowly darken and will become green before the autumn (though never as green as a regular *Catalpa*). The leaves are very large and heart-shaped and the flowers (white bell-shaped with yellow and purple markings) are displayed in large, open panicles in July and August – they always remind me of a miniature *Cymbidium* flower.

However, the interest doesn't finish there – the tree develops long, slender, pendulous, snake-like brown pods that look wonderful, retaining them well into the winter after all the leaves have gone. The first good frost can knock the leaves off, but this wide-spreading tree, that needs good light, is easy to maintain and is not particularly fussy about its soil. It originates from the south eastern United States where it lives on stream banks and low woodlands, although it doesn't want to sit in water. It also doesn't like an exposed, windy site.

Liriodendron tulipifera (Tulip Tree) is another of my favourite trees. Stately and majestic, it can grow to more than twenty metres tall in this country, so giving it adequate space to develop is critical. It is broadly columnar, but spreading with age and has large-ish lobed, lush, jade green leaves that turn butter yellow in the autumn. First found in the woodlands of the north east of America, you will need at least a fifteen-year-old specimen (although exceptions have been noted) to produce its tulip-shaped flowers that are yellow and green, and banded with orange at the base of the petals. Other cultivars such as *Aureomarginatum* and even a *Fastigiatum* provide more compact specimens for smaller gardens, but are hard to find.

I could go on and on, but I would be remiss not to mention *Aesculus pavia* and also *Aesculus*

parviflora, cousins to the classic conker tree, that both flower freely in July and August. Usually only found as a large shrub they have smaller chestnut-shaped leaves with species 'pavia' having crimson flowers in panicles and 'parviflora' being white with red anthers. Again from the US, whilst not exceeding two-and-a-half metres in height, they are wide-spreading, so will need adequate space to develop.

Other summer flowering trees I would recommend include: *Ailanthus altissima* (Tree of Heaven), *Magnolia grandiflora* *Galissoniere* (Evergreen Magnolia), *Robinia pseudoacacia* *Frisia*, *Koelreuteria paniculata* (Golden Rain Tree), and the *Sophora japonica* (Japanese Pagoda Tree).

For the more daring, I can also recommend *Albizia julibrissin* (Silk Tree) and if you have a sheltered, warm and sunny spot, *Lagerstroemia indica* (Crape Myrtle). Although rather tender for our climate, we do grow them commercially and *Albicias* are certainly popular and delightful. You must be prepared for a bit of dieback after a hard winter, which will require a hard prune, and should hope for, rather than expect, a bloom from your *Lagerstroemia* only after a particularly long and warm summer. ■

Steve McCurdy is Managing Director of Majestic Trees, which grows and plants semi-mature trees, hedging, and screening. Please call 01582 843881 or visit www.majestictrees.co.uk for further information.



SCULPTURE AT HATFIELD

The magnificent *Red Stag* (reclaimed metals) by George Hider, featured in last year's Encounters exhibition at Hatfield House

THIS MAY, HATFIELD House, in collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire Galleries, will launch **Eastern Approaches** – a new and ambitious open submission sculpture project which offers the opportunity for sculptors living or working in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk or any London borough to develop or site work in response to the ornamental gardens originally laid out in a groundbreaking design by John Tradescant the Elder in the early 17th century.

The exhibition will challenge, delight and

surprise visitors. The sculptures will be in aesthetic or conceptual harmony with the existing garden design, historical buildings and woodlands of the park.

For this first year of Eastern Approaches, the sculptures will exhibit a rootedness in, or a conceptual harmony or kinship with the themes of British or European landscape or garden design, the natural world or the changing seasons.

The exhibition will be open from May to September 2009. For further information please contact UH Galleries on 01707 284290 or uhgalleries@herts.ac.uk

SUBURB CENTENARY

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB Horticultural Society, 100 years old this year, is holding a special **Centenary Plant Sale** on Saturday 13 June, from 11:00am to 5:00pm in the grounds of The Tea House, Northway, London NW11.

At least five specialist nurseries – Daisy Roots, Finchley Nurseries, Littleheath Nursery, Pioneer Nurseries, and Rose Cottage Plants – will sell a wide selection of interesting plants. Entry is only £2.

The **Centenary Summer Flower Show** will be held next door at the Free Church Hall from 3:00pm – 5:30pm. The Centenary Opening Ceremony is at 3:00pm. Special Centenary flower and cookery classes are also featured, along with the Centenary Scarecrow Competition (open



to all ages), and, of course, home-made teas.

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of its foundation in 1909, the Horticultural Society is holding a **Centenary Festival of Roses** from 12 noon to 5:00pm on Saturday 18 July at

Fellowship House, Willifield Way, London NW11. Teas and a raffle of Henrietta Barnett roses (launched by Harkness Roses at Chelsea in 2007 to mark the centenary of Hampstead Garden Suburb). Also at 12 noon, outside the Rose Festival venue, there will be a **Grand Opening** of a stunning new community flowerbed created by Stephen Crisp and HGS Horticultural Society.

Further information on all the events celebrating Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society's centenary is available by calling 020 8455 0455 or by visiting the Society's website at www.hortsoc.co.uk



WHEN PLANNING A garden layout, positioning a construction such as a patio, summerhouse or pool, clearly it is essential to know where the sunlight will fall. Making even a small error is both disappointing and costly on a substantial investment.

Even without sunshine, with the Garden Planner's Sun Compass, it is very easy to instantly determine:

- ◆ which areas will be sunlit at breakfast, where the sun's maximum heat will occur and where the evening sunlight will fall (very few realise the sun does not set directly in the West in Summer).
- ◆ the maximum height of the sun and thus shadow and shade caused by obstructions.
- ◆ all sunrise and sunset positions, throughout the year, worldwide.

Perhaps even beyond the pure detail of directions, angles and heights, the most powerful aspect of this device is that it promotes thinking, about the value of sunlight and its effect on any garden plan.

The Garden Planner's Sun Compass is available online at www.suncompass.info or call 0870 620 8046. Price £19.00 inc. VAT plus £1.00 p&p.

NEW COUNTAX WEBSITE

British ride-on mower manufacturer, Countax Ltd., has launched a new website www.countax.com. The new website is intended to offer plenty of product information and guidance to help with purchasing or maintaining Countax products.

The website provides information on the full Countax range, including the new 'Mini' C330, designed specifically to fit through an average gateway, and the latest diesel model, the new D23-50LN.

Together with a new **dealer locator service** – where the input of a postcode will provide the enquirer with full details of their nearest Countax dealer – there are monthly gardening tips to help with the garden chores.



IMAGE BY HEATHER EDWARDS - GO TO WWW.IGPOTY.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT INTERNATIONAL GARDEN PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

CALLING ALL GARDEN PHOTOGRAPHERS!

The Secret Garden photographed by one of this year's finalists, Heather Edwards

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL Garden Photographer of the Year competition opened for entries on 1 March 2009. The closing date for entries is 30 November 2009.

The competition provides a treasure trove of ideas and inspiration for both aspiring and expert photographers who are encouraged, no matter what their level of experience, to enter this year's competition. Exciting prizes include a top cash award of £5,000. Every entrant will benefit just from taking part as they will have access to a series of workshops and talks, online critiques of entrants' photographs, plus 'top tips' available as downloads from the website - www.igpoty.com. The competition culminates in a fabulous outdoor exhibition at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Organiser, Philip Smith, said: "The competition provides huge opportunities to improve your photography and enjoy yourselves even if you don't win the big prize. There are 'early-bird' competitions running throughout the spring and summer with great prizes and chances to learn and improve your work."

Taking part, he explained, will encourage anyone who loves gardens or enjoys the natural world to observe and appreciate it even more fully.

Henrique Souto, a geography teacher from Portugal, won first prize in the competition's portfolio section in 2008 with his series of exceptional images of single leaves.

"The prize has made an enormous impact on my photographic life," he said. "Anyone who likes floral and garden photography must try this contest. All of us have something to learn from each other."

Photographers can enter any number of single photographs, or themed portfolios of six, into the competition's seven categories.

They are: Wildlife in the Garden, Plant Portraits, Garden Views, People in the Garden, The Edible Garden, Trees and World Botanic Gardens.

Budding photographers less than 16 years old can compete for the Young Garden Photographer of the Year Award.

Closing date for submissions is 30 November 2009. Online entry at www.igpoty.com
The second International Garden Photographer of the Year exhibition will be on display at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, from May to September 2009



The Rose Weekend & Summer Garden Show



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CAFÉ CHIC

It would seem no garden nursery is complete these days without a coffee shop. From dubious cappuccinos to full-blown three course lunches, we thought it would be fun to investigate a few and relate back to our *Garden Confidential* readers.



THE CHELSEA GARDEN CAFÉ AT IN-EX

The Chelsea Garden Café, at the In-Ex Garden Centre, in Goffs Oak, Hertfordshire, serves everything from morning coffee and traditional breakfasts to panini and Sunday roasts.

The café looks onto the Life Garden, an award-winning garden at the 2004 Chelsea Flower show, designed by renowned landscape architect, Erik de Maeijer, who works as our in-house designer.

Sit outside with a glass of chilled wine or beer and admire the simple but stimulating

space, with its light and vitality. It is an ideal place for gentle thoughts and reflections; perfect, in fact, to ponder how best to develop your own garden.

The café has a comprehensive, modern menu, but has maintained all the classics you might want.

IN-EX, 610 Goffs Lane, Goffs Oak, Hertfordshire EN7 5EP; telephone 01707 873311 or e-mail enquiries@in-ex.co.uk; web www.in-ex.co.uk. Open seven days a week, Monday–Saturday 8:30am to 5:30pm; Sunday 10:00am to 4:00pm. The Coffee Shop opening hours are Monday–Saturday 8:00am to 4:30pm, Sunday 10:00am to 3:00pm. We are closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and Easter Sunday.

THE TEA HOUSE AT PETERSHAM NURSERIES

The Tea House at Petersham Nurseries plays homage to the greatest Camellia of all, *Camellia sinensis* – commonly known as the tea plant – serving an extensive range of loose leaf and flowering teas including Assam, Lapsang Suchong, English Breakfast, Starlight Rose, Emerald Sun, Lavender Dream and infusions including camomile bud, fresh mint and peppermint.

Located in the heart of the nurseries in a sensitively renovated garden shed, the Tea House also serves English apple and pear juices, hand roasted, ethically sourced coffees (such as the fragrant and mild Ethiopian to the full bodied and rich Colombian) and home made cakes (e.g. lemon poppy seed, fig and almond, carrot and chocolate). At lunch time, homemade sandwiches made with naturally leavened breads and soups (such as borlotti bean and vegetables, sweet potato and ginger) are served while stocks last.

Best reached on foot following a leisurely stroll along the Thames from Richmond, or by bicycle, the Petersham Nurseries Tea House is a much loved local destination and the perfect place to relax while planning your garden for the year ahead.

Petersham Nurseries, Church Lane, Off Petersham Road, Petersham, Surrey, TW10 7AG; General Enquiries: 020 8940 5230; Restaurant Enquiries: 020 8605 3627; www.petershamnurseries.com



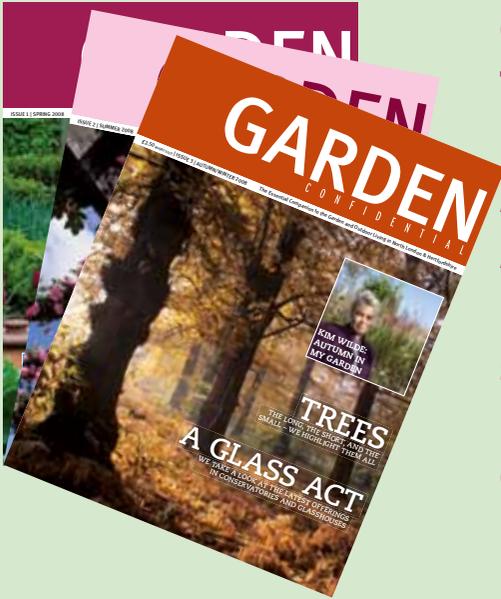
SOL-E-MIO CAFE AT SUNSHINE GARDEN CENTRE

Set amongst the flora of the garden centre you'll find a warm welcome at Sol-e-Mio.

Serving sandwiches, Panini's, homemade soups and hot dishes, with cakes, ice-cream, coffees, teas and smoothies there's something to suit a variety of tastes. The Sunday roast proves to be very popular.

Sunshine Garden Centre, Durnsford Road, London N11 2EL; Telephone 020 8829 8848; Open Monday–Saturday 9:00am – 5:00pm; Sundays 10:00am – 4:00pm; normal trading hours on Bank Holidays.

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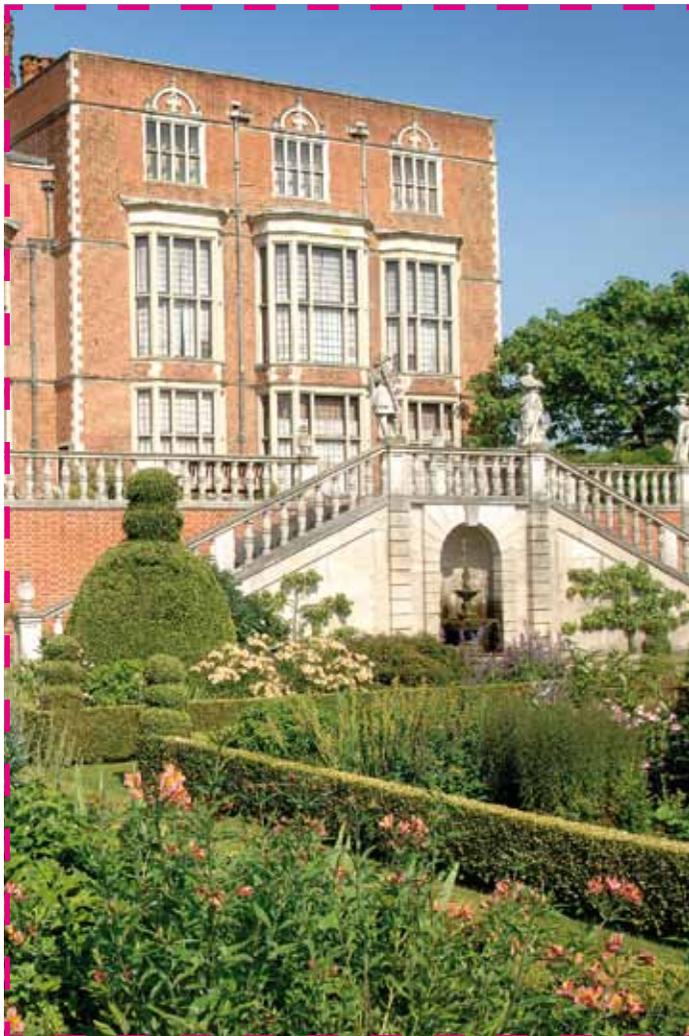
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Garden Confidential magazine is offering two full-price event tickets for the price of one. Adult admission is normally £10.50 per person and includes entry to Hatfield House, the West & East Gardens and Park. **Simply cut out and present this voucher when purchasing your tickets at the Hatfield House kiosk.**

The event takes place at Hatfield House, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL9 5NQ.

Visit www.hatfield-house.co.uk for more information.

Terms & Conditions

Offer valid for the Rose Weekend only 20–21 June 2009. Offer is for two for one full price ticket (£10.50) and does not apply to concessions. Only available in person on the day on presentation of this voucher. Limited to two tickets per person, per voucher. No advance booking. Subject to availability. Not valid in conjunction with any other offers or voucher schemes.



HATFIELD HOUSE

There's nothing so satisfying as seeing plants *in situ*. Take time-out and have a look at these gardens, which feature Iris borders in totally different settings.



HATFIELD HOUSE

Dating from the 17th century, the gardens here have evolved into a gardener's paradise. Every year the display of Iris, followed by roses, is a delight. Enjoy the peace of the West Garden with its scented garden and fountains, and view the famous knot garden adjoining the Tudor Old Palace. The Formal and Wilderness Gardens are open throughout the season. The East Garden is more formally planted with its parterre, topiary, herbaceous borders and vegetable garden.

Part of the RHS Member Gardens Scheme & National Gardens Scheme.

Hatfield House, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL9 5NQ

Tel: **01707 287010** e visitors@hatfield-house.co.uk w hatfield-house.co.uk

Visitor season runs from Easter to end of September. Garden open Wednesday–Sunday (and Bank Holiday Mondays). Daily in July–August. 11:00am–5:30pm.



ST PAUL'S WALDEN BURY GARDEN

This Grade I listed, formal woodland garden was laid out about 1720 in the classical French *patte d'oie* (goose foot) style. It covers about 50 acres and features radiating avenues, lined with clipped beech hedges, leading to temples, statues, a lake and ornamental ponds. The original architectural design is complemented by more recent flower gardens. There are seasonal displays of magnolias, rhododendrons, and lilies, while banks of cowslips and other wild flowers are encouraged.

This was the childhood home of the late Queen Mother, whose family have lived here since the garden began.

St Paul's Walden Bury, Hitchin, Herts. SG4 8BP. Five miles south of Hitchin on the B651. Tel: **01438 871218**

Open for charity Sundays April 26 and May 17, from 2:00pm to 7:00pm; Adults £3.50, children 50p. Also other times by appointment; adults £6.



MYDDLETON HOUSE GARDENS

The Gardens at Myddelton House are the creation of a great plantsman, E. A. Bowles and have been beautifully restored by the Lee Valley Regional Park. Within the Gardens you will find a collection of award-winning Bearded Iris, thousands of naturalised bulbs and many plants of real character. Truly a garden for all seasons; with some unusual plants and features, which has recently received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabling further restoration of artefacts, the Victorian Kitchen Garden and other facilities.

Myddelton House Gardens, Bulls Cross, Enfield, Middlesex, EN2 9HG

Tel: **08456 770 600** e info@leevalleypark.org.uk w leevalleypark.org.uk

The Gardens are open daily except for Christmas: April–September 10:00am–4:30pm; October–March 10:00am–3:00pm. Entrance fees are £3.10 and £2.60 for concessions.



RHS GARDEN WISLEY

For more than 100 years Wisley has been a centre of gardening excellence, providing visitors with an exceptional day out. As the flagship garden of the RHS, Wisley covers over 200 acres of beautiful garden to explore and enjoy. As part of the garden the Trials Field shows row after row of plants and flowers all being assessed. Iris's feature in June and form part of a long term trial. It's a wonderful chance to see many different varieties in one border.

RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB
Tel: **0845 260 9000** w rhs.org.uk/wisley

Open daily except Christmas Day, March–Oct 10:00am to 6:00pm (Nov–Feb 4:30pm)
Adults £8.50, RHS members free, children £2 (6–16), under 6 free
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GAP PHOTOS/S.SIPA DESIGN/CHRIS BEARISHAW

CONFIDENTIAL ESSENTIALS

Hostas and ferns along tiber path in a stumpy garden at Hampton Court in 2007

The Victorians loved ferns so much they built special Fernery greenhouses. We love them for their gorgeous, architectural fronds and for providing planting solutions to those damp/shady – or even worse, dry/shady – plots. Plant ferns in large numbers – they are far more dramatic in groups rather than one of each – but make sure that you have the right spot, as they don't like being transplanted.



GAP PHOTOS/ELKE BOROWSKI

POLYSTICHUM SETIFERUM

Evergreen

Lovely arching fronds give the whole plant a wonderful architectural quality. They are an excellent addition to the garden immediately but within three years they are positively show-stopping.

Height: 45–55cm.

Spread: 90cm.

Situation: Damp and shady, but will tolerate dry spells.



GAP PHOTOS/ELINA LEA

DRYOPTERIS CYCADINA

Semi-Evergreen

Has the archetypal fern 'shuttlecock' form with spectacular unrolling croziers. Looks very effective with most herbaceous plants and shrubs.

Height: 60cm.

Spread: 45cm.

Situation: Dry or lightly moist, partial shade.



GAP PHOTOS/BO

BLECHNUM CHILENSE

Evergreen

A must-have for all fans of jungly planting schemes, this grand fellow can reach 120cm. When new, fronds are deep red.

Height: 120cm.

Spread: Indefinite!

Situation: Shade, lots of water – but not waterlogged. Plant on a slope.



GAP PHOTOS/HAWARD DICE

ASPENIUM TRICHOMANES

Evergreen

A small froth of a fern, very pretty and definitely benefits from group planting. The fronds are dark green on black or dark brown stems.

Height: 15cm.

Spread: 20cm.

Situation: Dry shade.



GOOD THINGS IN SMALL PACKAGES

SEBASTIAN KNIGHT

Bug and bee boxes are as important as bird boxes to help our wildlife survive winter, and save our gardens from pests. By **Tim Webb**.

YOU CAN BUY ready-made designs or recycle garden waste and make your own bug and bee hotels. Old bamboo canes cut into short lengths and bundled together will do. You could even use some woody plant stems, twigs or any hollow tubes that provide insulation.



A 'Ladybird Hotel' encourages aphid-eating ladybirds to set up home in your garden

Having a slumbering army of lacewings, ladybirds and other helpful bugs gives gardeners a head start in the spring and summer battles with aphids and other garden pests.

It's estimated that worms create £16 billion of topsoil annually

For those who don't like creepy crawlies and slimy wriggly things, here are some sobering facts. Two of every three forkfuls of food that you put in your mouth grow as the result of insect pollination. Furthermore, earthworms are churning, enriching and aerating the soil this food grows in. It's estimated that worms create 16 billion pounds worth of topsoil every year.

As for birds, they help distribute seeds, eat some pests and add colour, movement, sound and joy to our lives. As someone who swells up at the merest sniff from a mosquito, I count swifts as my greatest allies. An adult swift can Hoover up some 10,000 flying insects and spiders every day!

And Our Survey Says...

January's Big Garden Birdwatch survey (as featured in our last issue) for north west London found little change in the top ten birds

commonly found in our gardens. Starlings come top but house sparrows tumbled one place to third position, pushed out of second place by wood pigeons. The other seven species in order are: blue tit, blackbird, feral pigeon, robin, great tit, magpie and collared dove.



A Swift can eat up to 10,000 flying insects and spiders a day

Numbers of starlings and house sparrows have continued to slide. Hampstead Heath and Primrose Hill are two of twenty study sites around London where different grass

DAVID TILING (RSPB IMAGES.COM)

and wildflower plots will be grown to see if they provide insects and seed to support house sparrows. It's thought a lack of the right sort of food is a major contributory factor behind their disappearance.

Variety Is The Spice Of Life

Creating a variety of habitats is key in a wildlife garden. Damp, cool places are beloved by toads. You don't need a pond to attract toads but it helps. These guys love nothing more than munching insects, slugs and snails. A pile of logs or a rockery near some shallow water is toad heaven. With a bit of imagination your log-pile can become an ornamental feature that can be sat on or, for the more nimble among us, climbed over.



A pile of logs or a rockery near some shallow water is toad heaven

If you see black fly, squish them immediately between your thumb and finger

Getting the balance right between the good garden guys and the bogeymen of the flowerbeds is not easy. It's a constant battle that requires prompt action. If you see black fly, squish them immediately between your thumb and finger or dash off and get some soapy water to squirt them with. If you leave them, they'll weaken the host plant and spread.

Wildlife gardens don't have to be all long grass, native shrubs and wild flowers. You can have ornamentals, exotics and space for kids to play in too. In fact, kids love discovering bugs, toads, and touching earthworms.



Visiting squirrels can be a nuisance eating your new spring shoots

In April and May, birds are well in to their nesting season and all the plants are bursting with fresh growth. It's the grey squirrel-breeding season too, so these garden visitors may be a bit of a nuisance digging up bulbs and shoots to eat.



Top up feeders throughout the spring

April is the time to dig-in evergreen hedges such as yew or holly. Layers of mulch should be spread over beds and borders. As the bird-breeding season reaches its climax, demand for protein from insects goes up and birds move away from the carbohydrate gained from seeds, nuts and berries. The extra nutrients needed to raise healthy young can only be gleaned from

insects, caterpillars and grubs. This doesn't mean you shouldn't supplement their diets by topping-up feeders.

Vigilance is key in June, or all your hard work could be undone. In between night-time forays and dawn raids on likely slug and snail nests you can relax with a long cool drink in a comfy chair to enjoy the sounds and sights of wildlife all around you.

We're Counting On You

But, don't rest on your laurels. Share what you've achieved in your garden. The RSPB is launching Make Your Nature Count. A new summer survey of garden wildlife that runs from June 8 to 14.



This is where you get to turn scientist, record what you see and send us the results. The information will help direct our conservation work and give us a snapshot of the health of our surroundings. Visit our website for more information and an online survey form at www.rspb.org.uk/naturecount

Tim Webb is the RSPB's Communications Officer for London. He is happy to accept and reply to your comments via tim.webb@rspb.org.uk

WATCHBOX

It's the season for new arrivals in our gardens as migratory birds swell the number of resident birds in the midst of their breeding season.



APRIL

Chaffinches love the white fruit of the snowberry

It's the breeding season so wrens and tits will all be active in the garden. Robins and finches will be stripping snowberries and blackbirds will visit your pyracantha. Look out for a wider variety of birds as farmland species venture in to gardens looking for extra food. Leave foliage on daffodils and tulips for a couple of months after they've flowered. This allows nutrients to ease back in to the bulb to fuel next year's growth. Concentrate on planting summer bulbs and sowing instead.



MAY

Swallows will build mud cup nests under the eaves

Swallows, swifts and martins will be appearing and looking for nest sites. Swift numbers have fallen because of changes in their African wintering grounds and a lack of nest sites in the UK. They've been re-categorised from green listed birds to amber, reflecting this concern. As winter supplies of nuts and berries dwindle, birds will rely more on insects and fruit to eat. So, fingers crossed for warm weather; a cold snap could kill off these vital new food supplies, depriving birds like the bullfinch.



JUNE

Chiffchaffs could be tempted to gardens by dense shrubs

Look out for adult birds carrying food to hungry fledglings this month. If you need to prune hedges or shrubs, check carefully for nests before hacking away. Disturbing active nests contravenes the Wildlife and Countryside Act and exposes chicks to predators. Leaving dense shrubs could also attract migrant species such as chiffchaff or willow warbler. In warm weather, bread can speed dehydration when eaten by birds, so ensure clean supplies of water are topped up.



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C O N F I D E N T I A L P L A N N E R



ILLUSTRATIONS: LENKA STRBNOVA

As all you gardeners know, spring-time is the busiest time of the year. Where to start? What to do first? Panic? No – just calm down and let our *Garden Confidential* maintenance expert **Ceri Evans** guide you through the top priorities for each month.

MARCH – APRIL

- 🌿 Feed the garden, except areas of bulbs, with a nitrogen rich fertiliser.
- 🌿 Weeding conscientiously in spring might make it easier later on.
- 🌿 Turf lawns.
- 🌿 Move and divide any herbaceous before they start to put on a growth spurt.
- 🌿 Divide snowdrops whilst still “in the green”.
- 🌿 Plant summer bulbs like gladiolus and *Nerines*, *Hemerocallis* and lilies.
- 🌿 Prune summer flowering shrubs like *Hypericum*, *Buddleja davidii* and *Spirea japonica*, tidy santolinas and trim heathers after flowering.
- 🌿 Pansies will keep flowering into summer if deadheaded regularly, don’t feed with spring fertiliser though, use a potash-rich feed such as tomato feed.
- 🌿 Dead head daffs as they finish flowering.
- 🌿 Watch out for aphids on new rose leaves, control with bio spray or washing-up liquid.
- 🌿 Clean debris from ponds and check the pump is working and check filters in case they need cleaning.
- 🌿 Do take photos of your garden in all seasons to help you plan your bulb planting next autumn, or new projects and major pruning.
- 🌿 If you are using an irrigation system, replace batteries and check connections so it is ready for use.

APRIL – MAY

- 🌿 Weeding, as if you need reminding.
- 🌿 Top dress and re-seed lawns.
- 🌿 Plant dahlias and tuberous begonias.
- 🌿 Dead head tulips as they finish flowering.
- 🌿 Treat for vine weevil.
- 🌿 Protect tender blossom from frost wherever possible with fleece or fine netting.

- 🌿 When using organic slug control such as garlic wash, start as soon as the foliage emerges.
- 🌿 Additional mulch for peonies and fruit trees after flowering.
- 🌿 Divide grasses and bamboos as soon as shoots start to appear.
- 🌿 Sow seeds of hardy annuals such as *Nigella*, night scented stock and California poppies.

MAY – JUNE

- 🌿 Plant summer bedding, if the long range forecast is frost free, do this in late-April if possible. Use “swellgel” in containers.
- 🌿 Plant sweet peas and start tying in as they get established.
- 🌿 Stakes in for delphiniums, peonies, *Helenium* & *Campanulas*.
- 🌿 Trim box hedging on an overcast day and feed afterwards.
- 🌿 If shaping or reducing lilacs, do so now immediately after flowering.
- 🌿 “Chelsea chop”: cut back *Pulmonaria* and feed to give new fresh leaves. Cut the top 10cm off *Rudbeckia*, *Monarda*, *Helenium* and *Coreopsis* to produce more compact plants with a later, longer flowering time, useful if you are holidaying in July.
- 🌿 If you have large clumps of Phlox that suffer mildew, thin out some of the stems.
- 🌿 First prune for all fast growing hedging: hornbeam, privet, cherry laurel.
- 🌿 Only remove daffodil foliage when it’s lost all colour, feed all spring flowering bulbs.





AN AQUATIC GARDEN

Andy Gabbutt shows
Garden Confidential readers
how to plant an aquarium

TURNING YOUR AQUARIUM into a fantastic aquatic garden is a trend that has only recently arrived in the UK. It started as a desire to produce a biotope aquarium – displaying your fish against the plants and general appearance of their native habitat. The development of sophisticated plant nutrition systems has now blossomed into a branch of aquatics with international competitions.

Unlike the terrestrial garden, the levels of carbon dioxide in your aquarium can fall below the optimum level for good plant growth, so the theory behind these aquatic systems is to provide the optimum level of carbon dioxide and the right trace elements.

Even the most difficult plants can flourish under these conditions provided you follow five easy steps.

maidenhead
aquatics

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Step One:

Spread a substrate of growing media over the bottom of the aquarium, sloping from the back to front of the aquarium base, to a maximum depth of about one centimetre. The substrate, rich in iron and trace elements, encourages good root growth. Any substrate that touches the front should be pulled back a centimetre or two. Then spread an aquarium gravel of roughly 3–5 mm over the substrate to a depth of two centimetres. Now carefully place rocks and or wood to form the “aquascaping” which is analogous to the hard landscaping in the garden.

Step Two:

The next and the most important nutrient is carbon dioxide, which can be delivered in a number of ways. The key is the diffuser, which allows the gas to mix with the tank water.

The carbon dioxide source in its simplest form can come from fermentation. The use of compressed gas in a gas cylinder dramatically improves controllability and also allows automation. A timer can be fitted so that the carbon dioxide can be turned off at night when the plants are not photosynthesizing. The pinnacle of sophistication is to connect to a pH probe. The pH controller switches the

CO₂ supply on and off in response to pH levels.

Step Three:

Lighting – vital for photosynthesis – cannot be overlooked. Use a light tube that has been optimized to be heavier at the red and blue ends of the light spectrum. It is important to ensure the tubes are fresh – quality deteriorates after about six months – and that you fit reflectors to ensure all the light produced is directed downwards into the tank and not wasted.

Step Four:

Almost anything will grow in the aquarium. In the initial stages it is wise to start with good strong plants. The Danish company Tropica is probably the best grower in the world. These are exclusively grown in pots using rock wool as a growing media. Once you've got the pots home, ease the rock wool out of the pot and tease it apart to expose the roots, then tease the roots to separate the plants. Long roots can be trimmed as can foliage – these trimmed plantlets are planted into the gravel as separate stems.

Some growers also grow plants like Java Fern (*Microsorium pteropus*) on pieces of wood or rocks, which can be used to give instant height. There are a couple of species of aquatic

mosses, which are favoured by the Japanese. These are available on wire gauze, which can be bent round.

Step Five:

Liquid feeds and the introduction of fish will provide a steady source of nitrates. Most growing systems use a liquid, which is predominantly chelated iron with other trace elements.

Fish can be added at any stage, providing movement, colour and interest. Apart from selecting fish on the basis of their ornamental splendour there are several species that will help in the maintenance of the tank. Fish of the Botia family eat snails and there are various species that eat algae. The very best algae eaters are shrimps of the genus *Caradina*. Adding a group of shrimps is like having a little gang of gardeners in the tank – they spend their time eating nuisance algae and dead leaves. Further information can be obtained from www.tropica.com which also has links to various sites which will provide inspiration. ■

Andy Gabbutt can be contacted at Maidenhead Aquatics, The Water Garden Centre, North Orbital Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL2 1DL. Telephone 01727 825815, or visit Maidenhead Aquatics online at www.fishkeeper.co.uk



Every year around 3,600 beautiful gardens to visit are listed in the NGS Yellow Book – most are private and only open for a day although there are a few which offer wider access to the public.

For further information on membership of the NGS either visit www.ngs.org.uk, e-mail friends@ngs.org.uk or call 01483 213910.

N2 66 Abbots Gardens, East Finchley

Designed for tranquillity and all-year interest, this 4-year old South-facing garden 20m x 10m uses plant form, colour, texture and strong underlying asymmetrical geometry, to create a calming yet dramatic environment with grasses, herbaceous perennials, ornamental shrubs and trees, water features and a discreet vegetable plot.

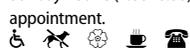
Sunday 17 May (2:00–5:30).



2 Stanley Road, East Finchley

Recently transformed front and rear garden of Edwardian semi, with formal 'heron-proof' pond, central circle, and viewing platform. Densely planted to create eight distinct areas, incorporating colourful vegetable plot, alpine bed, ferns and tree fern, bamboos and perennials. Boundaries softened with varied climbers for scent and foliage. Designed to be completely wheelchair-friendly without aesthetic compromise in hard landscape or planting. A garden for year-round enjoyment.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–6:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



East Finchley Cottage Gardens

Three very different cottage gardens, creating densely-planted intimate spaces filled with exuberant and varied planting in beds and pots. In one, cottage garden plants mingle happily with elegant ferns and grasses. A majestic black bamboo towers over pots of dainty annuals and a giant trachycarpus palm falls over a feathery tamarix. In another, 1960s crazy paving is fast disappearing to accommodate new planting. There are ponds and places to sit and relax.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–6:00).



15 Lytton Close, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Stunning formal garden (120ft x 60ft) planted for year-round interest with emphasis on texture and contrasting forms. Wide terrace with integral fishpond and fernery overlooks 60ft herbaceous border guarded by windswept seagulls set in impeccable lawns and leading to children's garden with playhouse and giant sunflowers. Pots of over 50 ornamental grasses line the eastern border, the whole surrounded by mature trees.

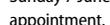
Sunday 28 June (2:00–6:00).



N6 44 Cholmeley Crescent

Contemporary family garden designed by Chelsea medal winner, Yulia Badian. Hardwood decking extends the living space. A boardwalk through 3 arches leads to summerhouse with green roof. Gabion baskets, planted and filled with slate, form an unusual retaining wall. Immaculate lawn. Low maintenance planting gives year-round colour and scent.

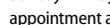
Sunday 7 June (2:00–6:30). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



3 The Park

Large garden with pond and frogs, fruit trees and eclectic planting. Interesting plants for sale. Children especially welcome.

Sunday 17 May (2:00–5:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment any time.



4 The Grove, Highgate Village

Delightful two-tiered garden. Formal upper garden with a mixture of Mediterranean and traditional plants and flowers; Cooper's Burmese rose and wildlife pond with fountain. Woodland area; hidden garden, greenhouse, laburnum tunnel and silver pear arch in bottom garden.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–5:30).



7 The Grove, Highgate Village

½ acre designed for maximum all-year interest with its variety of conifers and other trees, ground cover, water garden, vistas, 19 paths, surprises. Exceptional Camellias in April.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–5:30). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



2 Millfield Place

1½-acre spring and summer garden with camellias, rhododendrons, many flowering shrubs and unusual plants. Spring bulbs, herbaceous borders, small orchard, spacious lawns.

Sunday 10 May (2:00–6:00). Evening Opening £3.50 (children free), wine on Wednesday 17 June (5:30–9:00).



Southwood Lodge

Secret garden hidden behind C18 house (not open), laid out last century on steeply sloping site, now densely planted with wide variety of shrubs, climbers and perennials. Ponds, waterfall, frogs and newts. Many unusual plants are grown and propagated for sale.

Sunday 3 May (2:00–5:30). Visitors also welcome by appointment April to July.



N10 5 Cecil Road

Garden designer's sloping garden with unusual small trees, shrubs and perennials. Garden office with green roof of bulbs etc.

Sunday 28 June (2:00–5:00).



16 Cecil Road

Garden designer's own garden appears at first glance a romantic painting. Three levels are linked together by strong structural planting. Perennials weave through, with interest at each season. Designed on a subtle colour palette, the garden is atmospheric and interesting from all angles, even in winter. Steps may be unsuitable for infirm or very young.

Sunday 3 May (2:00–6:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment, groups welcome at most times of year.



15 Dukes Avenue

Mediterranean-style gravel front garden in silver, lilacs, pinks and blues. Small back garden crammed with wide variety of plants, many unusual. Large plant sale including rarer salvias and other plants for dry, sunny sites.

Sunday 17 May (2:00–5:00).



46 Dukes Avenue

Designer and botanical illustrator's country-style garden described as being 'just on the right side of controlled chaos'. Organic, curvy beds with foxgloves, aquilegias, irises and valerian anchored with clipped evergreens. Topiary, grasses and driftwood throne from the medal-winning garden Judith designed for the Chelsea Flower Show in 2003.

Sunday 17 May (2:00–6:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment in May & June only.



6 Methuen Park

Contemporary family garden designed by Chelsea medal winner. Hardwood decking extends the living space. Across the formal pond the beach grows into a path. An arch doubles as a swing. Flowing curves and unique planting create an enchanting peaceful space. Tree house provides hours of entertainment.

Sunday 21 June (2:00–6:30). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



5 St Regis Close, Alexandra Park Road

A cornucopia of sensual delights! Artists' garden renowned for unique architectural features and delicious cakes. Baroque temple, pagodas, oriental raku-tiled mirrored wall conceals plant nursery. Compost heap with medieval pretensions alongside American Gothic shed. Maureen Lipman's favourite garden, combining colour, humour and trompe l'oeil with wildlife-friendly ponds, waterfalls, weeping willow and lawns. Imaginative container planting and abundant borders including exotic and native species, creating an inspirational and re-energising experience.

Sundays 3 May & 28 June (2:00–7:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



33 Wood Vale

Very long garden entered via steep but safe staircase. Unusual trees and Mediterranean shrubs with emphasis on shapes, textures and foliage colour. Garden on two levels, the first more formal with a centrepiece fountain, the second meandering, leading to mixed borders and camomile seat.

Sun 17 May (2:00–6:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



N12 71 Fallowcourt Avenue, Finchley

Well maintained 120ft x 30ft South-facing plot. Densely planted garden of trees, shrubs and perennials, at its first peak in May/June. Sunlit borders and shaded area with an intimate patio at rear, not immediately visible from the house. Many Japanese varieties: tree peonies, maples, magnolias, cherry blossoms, azaleas, hydrangeas, hostas and irises.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–5:30).



N21 39 Arundel Gardens, Winchmore Hill

100ft x 30ft town garden planted informally with unusual shrubs, climbers and herbaceous plants. Arbour, water features and conservatory with a collection of cacti and succulents.

Sundays 17 & 24 May (2:00–6:00).



NW2 64 Blenheim Gardens

Mixed shrubs, roses, climbers and perennials informally planted to give a lush and dense effect. Garden is organically maintained. Pergola area with wildlife pond. Small, shady hideaway. Courtyard with statue and containers. Recent changes including more grasses to achieve a natural, soft appearance and patio pots with long-lasting displays of acers, palm trees and bamboos.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–5:00).



10 Hoveden Road

70ft x 25ft award-winning urban garden. Stylish deck with pergola and fish pond leads into attractive circular paved area surrounded by box hedging and deeply planted borders. Shade area at the end of the garden features gazebo. No access for wheelchairs or prams.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–6:00).



208 Walm Lane, The Garden Flat

Large South-facing oasis of green with big sky. Meandering lawn with island beds, fishpond with fountain, curved and deeply planted borders of perennials and flowering shrubs. Shaded mini woodland area of tall trees underplanted with rhododendrons, ferns and hostas with winding path from oriental-inspired summerhouse to secluded circular seating area.

Day & Evening Opening Sunday 7 June (2:00–8:00).



NW3 17 Belsize Lane, Hampstead

Newly-created garden (autumn 2006) rapidly establishing, with backdrop of mature trees. Irregularly shaped plot gradually reveals design of different moods and all-year colour and texture. Pergolas

with many climbers; small pond; unusual plants; container planting. Curved beds for dry, shady, woodland planting; "edible" beds for fresh food.

Sunday 14 June (2:00–6:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment all year, coaches permitted.



Fenton House

Timeless 1½-acre walled garden, laid out on three levels, containing imaginative plantings concealed by yew hedges. The herbaceous borders give year-round interest while the brick-paved sunken rose garden provides a sheltered hollow of scent and colour. The formal lawn area contrasts with the rustic charm of the kitchen garden and orchard. Vine house. In spring, good borders and underplanted orchard.

Evening Openings £3.50, children £1.50, wine, Thursdays 7 May & 4 June (6:30–8:30).



Little House A, Hampstead

1920s Arts & Crafts house (not open) built by Danish artist Arild Rosenkrantz. Award-winning front and rear garden set out formally with water features, stream and sculpture. Unusual shrubs and perennials, many rare, including Paeonia rockii and Dicksonia fibrosa. Wide collections of hellebores, hostas, toad lilies, acers, clematis and astrantia.

Sunday 14 June (2:00–6:00).



1 Lower Merton Rise

Approximately ¼ acre. Cottage-style garden with herbaceous borders, lawns and roses. A sunken courtyard with cascade, pergolas and winding paths link the different areas.

Sunday 21 June (2:00–6:00).



NW6 5 Greville Place

Recently created garden, establishing fast. Large front garden with herbaceous planting. Behind the house a stream links two ponds and meanders through a woodland garden. Good collection of ferns and many unusual plants. Interesting Victorian pots.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–5:30). Visitors also welcome by appointment for groups of 8+, June, July & September.



NW8 116 Hamilton Terrace

Lush front garden full of dramatic foliage with a water feature and tree ferns. Large back garden of different levels with York stone paving, many large terracotta pots and containers, water feature and lawn. Wide variety of perennials and flowering shrubs, many unusual, and subtropical plants, succulents, acers, ferns, hebes, climbers, roses, fuchsias and prizewinning hostas. Packed with colour and rich foliage of varied texture.

Sunday 21 June (2:00–6:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



NW11 4 Asmunds Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Award-winning Arts & Crafts cottage garden in artisan's quarter of Hampstead Garden Suburb. Many clematis and other climbers both front and back. Pond, patio, herbaceous bed, shade area. Succulents, acers and other plants in pots and containers. Sculptures and objets trouvés.

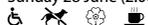
Sunday 28 June (2:00–5:30).



113 Corringham Road, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Garden designer and plantswoman's garden created since 2005 behind a house situated in listed Arts and Crafts courtyard. The formal garden is profusely planted with perennials, unusual annuals and shrubs with an emphasis on painterly colour combinations. Dry shade woodland garden, wildlife pond, sculptured figure, potager, greenhouse and lavishly planted containers.

Sunday 28 June (2:00–6:00).



48 Erskine Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Bird-friendly, pesticide-free garden wrapped around artisan's cottage in Hampstead Garden Suburb. Perennials, shrubs, roses,

clematis, Cotinus Grace. Lawn shaded by large apple tree and flowering cherry. Terrace with many pots and containers. Brick-paved area with four raised beds, including tiny box-edged organic herb and vegetable patch.

Day & Evening Opening Sunday 7 June (2:00–6:00 £2.50, children free; 6:00–8:00 £4 with wine & nibbles, children free).



5 Heathgate, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Set in a stunning borrowed tree-scape on the edge of Hampstead Heath, this 45ft x 25ft Arts and Crafts garden has lavishly planted traditional herbaceous borders with newly installed contemporary features

Sunday 31 May (2:00–6:00).



5 Hillcrest Avenue

Small labour-saving traditional back garden; rockery, fish pond, conservatory, tree ferns, secluded patio. Urban jungle front garden with drought-resistant plants, traditional back garden. Chairlift available from decking to main garden.

Sunday 14 June (2:00–6:00), Evening Opening £3, wine & light refreshments, Wednesday 17 June (5:00–9:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



5 Turner Drive, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Romantic Suburb garden backing onto Hampstead Heath. Wide paved terrace leads to pergola walk with a wisteria and jasmine arbour. Mature cercis and acacia. Well stocked borders with azalea and rhododendrons all set in a beautiful tree-scape.

Sunday 31 May (2:00–6:00).



94 Oakwood Road, Hampstead Garden Suburb

A fine example of a typical Hampstead Garden Suburb cottage garden. In beautiful woodland setting, divided into two rooms by box hedging. Arch with lawns, an old wisteria, and unusual plants. Herbaceous borders filled with colour and foliage.

Sunday 24 May (2:00–5:30). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



91 Willifield Way, Hampstead Garden Suburb

Windows and doors are framed by topiaried pyracantha. Re-creation of an Elizabethan knot garden with four box-edged beds densely planted for year-round interest. Dovecote, mosaic floor, sink troughs with alpines and succulents.

Sunday 17 May (2:00–5:00).



SW15 5 Garden Close

¼-acre walled garden which serves as backdrop to architect's all-glass house. Oriental inspiration with black bamboos, and swathes of box, hebe, lavender and rhododendrons. Ponds and timber decks surround house. New planting. House and garden open.

Sundays 24 May & 21 June.



SW19 97 Arthur Road

½-acre garden of an Edwardian house. Garden established for more than 20 years and constantly evolving with a large variety of plants and shrubs. It has grown up around several lawns with pond and fountains. Abundance of wildlife and a bird haven. A beautiful place with much colour, foliage and texture.

Sunday 7 June (2:00–6:00).



123 South Park Road, Wimbledon

A high deck in the trees looks over the main area of lawn, water, patio and pots. This small, harmonious L-shaped garden contains a courtyard with raised vegetable beds and pergola, and a hot tub!

Sunday 14 June (2:00–6:00).



Southside House, Wimbledon Common

Romantic country garden extending to almost two acres. Mature trees and hedges and a long informal canal form the structure of this unique and amusing garden. Two grottos, two temples, pet

cemetery, young orchard and wild flower meadow. Many of the smaller plantings are being gradually renovated. Lovely swathes of bluebells and small fernery.

Sundays 26 April & 10 May (11:00–5:00).



EN2 Myddelton House Gardens, Enfield

Four acres of gardens created by EA Bowles. Gardens feature diverse and unusual plants including National Collection of award-winning bearded irises. Large pond with terrace, conservatory and interesting historical artefacts. A garden for all seasons.

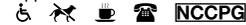
Sundays 26 April & 24 May (12:00–4:00).



EN4 West Lodge Park, Hadley Wood

10-acre Beale Arboretum consists of over 700 varieties of trees and shrubs, including National Collection of Hornbeam cultivars, with a good selection of conifers, oaks, maples and mountain ash. A network of paths has been laid out, and most specimens are labelled.

Sunday 17 May (2:00–5:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



TW9 Leyborne Park Gardens, Kew

Three gardens in strikingly contrasted styles, close to one another and within easy reach of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Tickets from 38 Leyborne Park only. Fiveways is the mature and surprisingly large and private garden of Victorian cottage character. It features late spring flowers with flowering shrubs and large trees around an irregular lawn, with some narrow paths (partial wheelchair access). 38 Leyborne Park's long narrow garden is maturing with its owners. Some trendy bits: blue shed, finds from skips, bananas. Then the urge to do that bit less: extended terrace, pots, statuesque shrubs, collection of peonies. A plantaholic trying to simplify – without success! 64 Leyborne Park is a family garden with lawn and mixed beds. Also a potager and hidden vegetable plot.

Sunday 24 & Monday 25 May (2:00–5:00).



HA6 23 Links Way, Northwood

¾-acre, artist's garden with rhododendrons and azaleas, sweeping lawn, herbaceous border of perennials, annuals and shrubs; stunning Magnolia grandiflora. Six ponds, three stocked with fish, the others within beautiful rock garden with alpines and acers.

Sunday 24 May (2:00–7:00). Visitors also welcome by appointment.



KT6 Fishponds House, Surbiton

Large garden, part formal, part terrace, with adjoining woodland overlooking a large duck pond. Partly redesigned by Andy Sturgeon and filled with structural plants and grasses. Visitors could visit the park for a picnic before garden opening.

Sunday 14 June (2:00–5:00).



KT7 Little Lodge, Thames Ditton

Partly walled informal flower garden filled with shrubs and herbaceous plants that create an atmosphere of peace. Small secret garden; terracotta pots; stone troughs and sinks; roses; clematis; topiary; very productive parterre vegetable garden.

Sunday 31 May (11:30–5:00).



Wheelchair access to at least main features of the garden. Often disabled parking is available close by, or in owner's driveway.

No dogs except guide dogs. Where dogs are allowed they must be on leads.

Plants usually for sale, often propagated by the garden owners.

NCCPG Garden that holds a NCCPG National Plant Collection. Refreshments are available, normally at a charge. Wine is often available at Evening Openings.

Gardens showing this symbol welcome visitors by prior arrangement.



There's a plethora of new gardening books out this spring, providing inspiration on everything from design and hard landscaping to practical planting advice for both budding and experienced gardeners. By Hannah Stephenson

TV GARDEN GURUS Alan Titchmarsh, Toby Buckland and Joe Swift all have new books coming out, while the famous Dr D.G. Hessayon, author of the popular Expert series, is spreading the 'green' word.

Here is a selection of books providing inspiration and offering advice to both budding and experienced gardeners alike.

1,000 Garden Ideas by Stafford Cliff

This is the book for anyone who has trouble visualising ideas and needs some pictures for inspiration. Each category, ranging from tiles, paths and paving, to garden benches, pots, gates, edging and topiary, is illustrated with masses of small photographs to show what effect can be achieved by using particular materials and styles, from modern to traditional. Author and designer Stafford Cliff, who has visited thousands of gardens on his travels, has recorded the cleverest solutions.

Published by Quadrille, £14.99

RHS Wildlife Garden by Martyn Cox

Instead of an Easter egg for the kids, splash out on this gem of a book to encourage your children to get into the garden and explore, as well as do their bit for the environment. There are many fun projects including making a stag beetle bucket, growing sunflowers, keeping a nature diary and making a bird house from a flowerpot. The book is full of child-friendly pictures of how to go about the tasks and features simple information about all manner of wildlife and its importance, from frogs and toads to hedgehogs, birds and bugs.

Published by Dorling Kindersley, £9.99

How To Make Your Garden Grow by Toby Buckland

This book for beginners, brought to us by the new presenter of BBC Gardeners' World, focuses largely on specific plants which are easy to grow and can make a real impact, including allium, lavender, lilies and other bulbs, as well as cottage garden favourites such as roses, delphiniums and hollyhocks. This is a book to get you started, with basic advice on the tools you need and how to enrich your soil, as well as seed-sowing, watering and looking for pests.

Published by Mitchell Beazley, £12.99

The Green Garden Expert by Dr D.G. Hessayon

Dr Hessayon has had a massive influence on gardening in the last 50 years and now a new version of his original *Garden Expert* rings the changes as it's written with the environment in mind. It shows how to care for wildlife, the environment and your own well-being, whether you decide upon a totally organic approach or prefer to take a few steps along the eco-friendly road.

Published by Expert Books, £7.99



The Book Of Weeds by Ken Thompson

Anyone who despairs of all those plant invaders who pop up just where you don't want them should bag a copy of this little gem, which features witty, down-to-earth advice on how to stop them taking over your garden. A 'rogue's gallery' will help you identify whether the weeds you have are just annual or if they are hardened perennials such as the dreaded bindweed and ground elder and how to best eradicate them.

Published by Dorling Kindersley, £13

CONFIDENTIAL POTAGER THE STRAWBERRY

Is there anything more delicious than a freshly-baked cake? **Jane Tocher** says “yes” if you have sourced the ingredients from your back garden!

NO SPACE IS too small for a greenhouse and provided you maximise the area, you will be amazed at what you can grow and then cook!

Each issue of *Garden Confidential* Jane will show us how to extend our gardens into our kitchens.

Strawberries – now here is a fruit for every greenhouse owner!

An ideal choice is Flamenco – sweet and juicy, it fruits over a long picking period, from mid-July to November, with most of the fruit in September. This is one of the best varieties to grow if space is limited. Heavy cropping, and so sweet, you don't even need sugar. And they are perfect for my Strawberry Shortcake (see opposite).

When buying strawberry runners, choose strong plants raised from certified stock, from a reputable source, guaranteed to be free from pests and diseases. From their dormant state, they will quickly establish a good root system, vigorous leaf growth in the spring followed by a tasty crop to harvest.

Plant up the plants in early spring into 5" pots, grow bags or strawberry pots. When the flowers start to open, hand-pollinate by simply brushing the blossoms carefully with a cotton bud. Keep plants in a well-lit spot with the greenhouse well ventilated. After flowering, feed weekly with a liquid fertilizer until the fruit start to colour (then stop), and keep the air moist once the fruit start to swell. Replace the plants each year.

Catch-Crops

The clever way to use your greenhouse for vegetables is to use every inch of it during the

season for 'catch-crops'. This means that fast-growing outdoor veg like beetroot and carrots can be grown inside early in the season between tall crops such as tomatoes.

So, if you are just beginning, my advice is plant up ever-popular tomatoes and immediately sow them underneath with carrots. I suggest a variety like Parmex – round and bite-sized at a full grown size of less than two inches. Delicious as well!

Or what about some mixed salad leaves? Thompson and Morgan's 'Niche Collections' mix combines tastes, flavours and colours. The Oriental Mix has a collection of leaf mustards (golden, streaked and red leaf varieties), Komatsuma, Mizuna and Sky Rocket. Simply scatter the seeds underneath your tomato plants and thin out as necessary.

Jane Tocher is a director of Country Greenhouses Ltd.
www.countrygreenhouses.co.uk, telephone 01256 381825.

With thanks to Thompson & Morgan for the use of their images
www.thompson-morgan.com

£ Confidential Saver £



A clever idea from Thompson & Morgan – recycle old newspapers and make your own pots using their Paper Potter. When seedlings are ready to plant out, transplant them straight into the garden in their biodegradable paper pots.

£



STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE

Ingredients

175g (6oz) plain flour (or 125g (4oz) plain flour or wholemeal flour and 50g (2oz) ground rice)
Pinch salt
125g (4oz) butter
50g (2oz) caster or light brown soft sugar

Method

1. Pre-heat oven to 180°C (350°F) or gas mark 4
2. Grease and line a baking sheet
3. Sift the flour into a bowl
4. Rub in the butter until mixture resembles breadcrumbs, stir in the sugar and quickly work the ingredients together to a dough
5. Press dough into an 8" round on a metal baking sheet or individual biscuit size shapes
6. Cook for 30–40 minutes until pale golden colour

After cooking, mark out the sections while it is still warm then leave to cool in the tin.

To Serve

Leave the shortbread whole. Mix strawberries with whipped cream or fromage frais then spoon onto the shortbread. To decorate, leave the leafy tops on a few strawberries then cut thin slices through the fruit with a very sharp knife leaving the slices attached at the stem end. Holding the stem, lightly press the slices into a fan shape.

The secret of shortbread is to handle it as little as possible and keep it cool (the less it comes into contact with your hands the better). Avoid rolling it if possible, just press it quickly into the desired shape. A final roll with a glass tumbler will ensure that it is even. Prick it all over to keep it from rising up.

Confidential Tip

To shape shortbread attractively, press the dough into a fluted metal flan ring on a baking sheet.

YOUR LETTERS

This is our fourth issue and we are as excited as ever to keep getting your letters. It is such a thrill for us to know that you are really out there, reading and responding.

With the weather getting better every day – take a trip to our featured Historic House or check out our Timely Visits. Let us know what you think, make it positive or negative and we will publish the most incisive. Alternatively, if you just want to comment on this issue or share your gardening pleasures and woes with us, we will be delighted to respond. And by the way, any letter we publish will entitle the writer to a free two-year subscription to GC! Answers by **Melanie Wand**.

Write to us at letters@gardenconfidential.co.uk

We reserve the right to edit correspondence.

TULIP TWITTER

Dear *Garden Confidential*,

I am new to gardening and am delighted to own my first garden!

For twelve months, I have been gradually creating a pretty little bit of paradise at the rear of my flat in Crouch End.

I am due to plant 50 tulip bulbs soon and have been wondering how to do it. Your article on planting tools was excellent and timely! Thank you so much for the inspiration and also advice.

Emma Barnes, Crouch End N8

Hi Emma,

All the bulbs must be up now – a photo of your garden would be great, together with a note to let us know which tool took your fancy. **MW**

GOOD NEWS TRAVELS FAST

Dear Sirs,

I received the first three editions of *Garden Confidential* from a friend living in England. I am amazed by your beautiful magazine. It gives a lot of useful information and the photos are great.

Stefan Rohn, Baden-Baden, Germany

Well, we try hard! **MW**

BAMBOOZLED AGAIN!

Hello *Garden Confidential*,

I read G Turnbull's letter about bamboo [Autumn/Winter 2008 issue] with interest, together with your Editor's answer, and thought I would write with another suggestion on how to rid yourself of the invasive bamboo.

Please note I have not tried this yet! Whilst in my local ironmongers I got chatting about the garden and another customer was asking advice about getting rid of bamboo.

The shop owner said the most effective product was Sodium Chlorate. Although you cannot plant anything else for several months, it may be the last resort. One can only try!

Dermot Milligan, NW2

Sodium Chlorate is an option but please visit the Pesticides Safety Directorate at www.pesticides.gov.uk for guidance. Alternatively, the Herbicide Handbook is available, free, as a PDF download from www.naturalengland.org.uk. **MW**



Kim Wilde, pictured in her wonderful garden, as featured in our last issue

WILDE AT HEART

Dear Editor,

What a lovely article in your Autumn issue by Kim Wilde. It's so lovely to see a celebrity's garden that doesn't look as if it's making an appearance on the red carpet! It looks so natural and inspirational. Thank you to Kim for sharing it with us.

David & Geraldine McArthur, via e-mail

Kim is as lovely and natural as her garden, with a wealth of horticultural knowledge that she is always pleased to share. **MW**

TREES FOR SMALL GARDENS

Sir,

Your article on trees for small gardens does not mention whether there are small trees that are suitable to be planted in a reasonably large container and what difficulties will arise apart from the obvious watering. Any suggestions would be most welcome.

Mr JPA Shuttleworth, Enfield

Yes, there are several trees suitable. Try a *Cordyline australis* for an architectural look, or a standard *Pittisporum tenuifolium* to add height or the blue spruce *Picea pungens* if space is a problem. Since a pot can only hold a limited amount of soil they are prone to drying out which depletes nutrients. So, as well as watering, add a slow release fertiliser. Another tip is use rain water – so ensure you have a water butt close by. **MW**

BEE KIND

I have read several articles in the press about the serious problem of dying bees. Last year I was regularly finding bumblebees on my garden table looking very much on their last legs. I decided to try an experiment and put a teaspoonful of honey on the table next to the bee. The poor thing made a valiant effort to crawl to the honey and spent about 20 minutes taking it. After a few minutes more it moved quickly across the table and flew away. I continued to do this over the summer and hope that it helped.

Eleanor Jack, Hampstead Garden Suburb

We should do everything we can for the Bumble Bee! Visit

www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk for more information. Perhaps we should open this up to our readers? If any of you out there can enlighten us, and Eleanor, please get in touch. **MW**

GREEN ROOFS CAN BE COLOURFUL

Further to your article on green roofs [Spring 2008 issue] may I forward a small tip?

The sedums and other alpines that thrive on the roof of my shed, I particularly chose from several suppliers to give me variety of form and colour. Another tip – while your plants are getting started I found covering them with some fruit netting stopped the birds pecking at the new shoots.

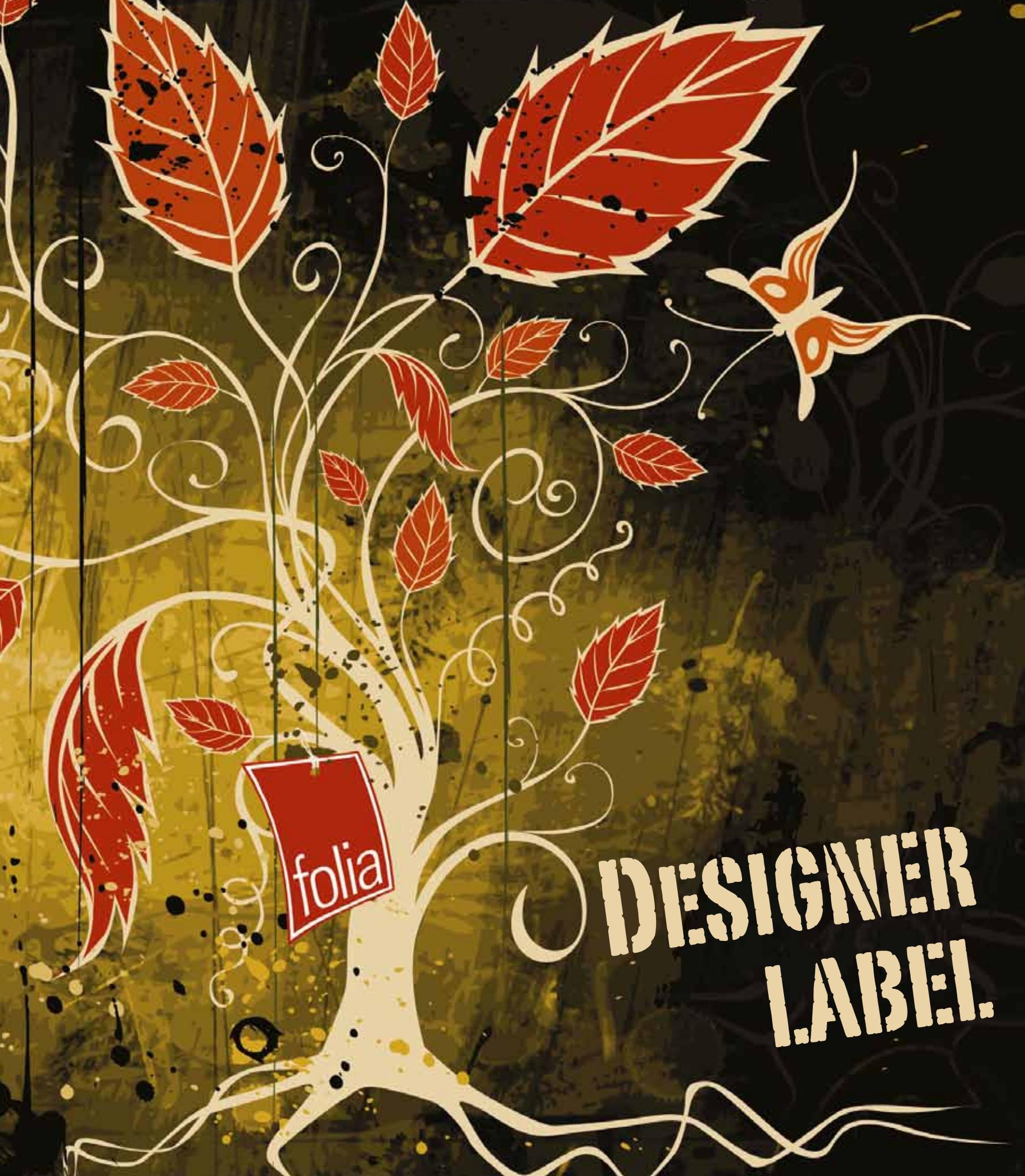
Mrs J Standing, via e-mail

Thank you so much for your tips – green roofs are such a new phenomenon, relatively speaking, in this country at least, that the more feedback the better. Is there anyone else out there with hands-on experience of their green roof? We would love to hear from you. **MW**

We have received several letters and e-mails from readers telling us that they have not received all issues of our magazine. We are delighted that you are enjoying *Garden Confidential* and look forward to receiving your copy.

As we vary our area of distribution with each issue we may not always be covering your street.

To ensure delivery of your copy please see page 36 where, for the cost of the postage and packing you can subscribe to *Garden Confidential*.



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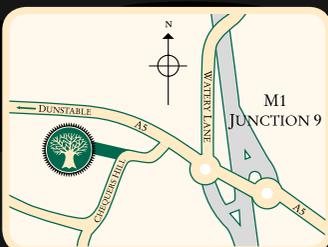


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