

The Arts and Crafts Garden



Prue Beard's delightful garden in Hampstead Way has twice won the HGS Horticultural Society's cup for the Best Suburb Garden which you may have seen when she opened it for charity last spring under the London Gardens Scheme. Prue confesses to being an obsessive gardener. Her keen gardening parents encouraged her as a child but she didn't show much interest until she acquired her first flat. "Overnight, I became obsessed," she recalls. "I think it provides me with a creative outlet. I've always been interested in painting and in a way gardening is like painting with flowers, using texture, colour and scent to create a living artistic picture."

Prue and her husband, Mervyn Unger, took over this garden fifteen years ago. The basic structure was left mainly untouched; in the front a new lawn was laid to mirror the existing patch, but the planting is virtually all new. The underlying rectangular structure is dictated by the path to the front door but, in true cottage-garden style, the plants are allowed to flop over the lawn edges and self-seed around the borders, giving it an informal, relaxed air.

Front and back gardens are roughly the same size, 30 x 40 m; the perfect Arts and Crafts house sits squarely in the centre of the plot, facing south. The typical wet clay is here lightened by decades of leaf-mould, and being on a slope there is no standing water so woodland plants flourish. A massive silver birch dominates

the front garden; local gossip has it that it is a seedling from the Second World War era and Prue has wisely adapted the planting to fit around the tree, creating a charming woodland garden seen at its best in spring. Lots of bulbs and early-flowering geraniums weave through flowering shrubs – viburnum, potentilla, cornus and rosemary.

In summer, the shade cast by the birch canopy makes the ground very dry. Clematis and roses, favourites of Prue, struggle with the difficult conditions. "But it's worth it," she says. "I spot - water when necessary and feed generously all summer." Japanese anemones, euphorbia and sedum are interspersed with occasional annuals and hardy cyclamen for late colour.

The garden is so densely planted that Prue claims to do very little digging. New plants are carefully trowelled into very small spaces and lovingly tended thereafter. Prue reckons to spend a minimum of ten hours a week outside in summer, dead-heading, mulching, weeding and watering this labour-intensive garden. The beds are regularly mulched with spent mushroom compost (direct to the door by Thompson's of Crews Hill – 0808 155 8137) and homemade compost. Prunings are shredded and used as mulches. Prue also maintains a wormery, bought at a discount from Barnet Council, which in addition to producing beautiful compost, provides her with liquid manure.

Prue aims for all-year interest but "Nature dictates that it's at its

best in spring." Favourite plant combinations include heucheras mixed with the hardy geranium, Anne Folkard. The bronze heucheras make a stunning contrast with the geranium's golden foliage and crimson flowers. Other easy, eye-catching combinations are pink, cream or dark red tulips (try Angelique or Queen of the Night) with self-seeded forget-me-nots; or allium Purple Sensation with pink roses. A favourite is the herbaceous Clematis integrifolia Durandii: "For most of the summer it has bright blue vivid flowers that sprawl over everything. Not a climber, it weaves its way through other plants and shrubs."

The garden at the back of the house is much more formal. It looks like everyone's idea of the perfect country garden in an old rectory. It also owes much to the ideas of Gertrude Jekyll whose gardens often consisted of geometrical compartments filled with permanent plants in soft, flowing groups. Here, twin box-edged beds sit in a York stone parterre surrounded by high hedges clad in shrubs and climbers. The central path leads to a pretty bird-bath; in the corner a clematis-covered arch hides the compost heap. In spring, pink and cream tulips rise above emerging clumps of hardy geranium and heucheras. Dicentra alba and Achillea the Pearl add cool notes to the display. As the seasons progress, the colour deepens with Penstemon Blackbird, dahlias, lychnis and crocosmia. Annual cosmos and pots of home-grown

nasturtiums extend the season until the first frosts. A standard rose – Valentine Heart – adds focus and charm to the scheme

The garden is very wild-life friendly. Birds are encouraged with boxes, feeders and a birdbath, and seed-heads are left all winter. A nettle patch is cultivated for butterflies and logs are piled in a corner as a safe haven for hedgehogs and beetles (great scavengers on aphids and harmful grubs).

Prue has drawn her inspiration from three of the great women gardeners of the 20th Century: Beth Chatto, Penelope Hobhouse and Rosemary Verey. She has created a beautiful garden in the best Arts and Crafts tradition, using a wide variety of shrubs and plants, meticulously tended. We should all be proud of her achievement.

ANNE CRAWLEY



You could have knocked him over with a feather, there were quite a lot of feathers actually all over the garden of the Tomlin's house in Brunner Close, when a sparrow hawk calmly breakfasted on a wood pigeon within full view of the kitchen window from which Mike Tomlin was able to take this picture of the handsome raptor.

Suburb Rainfall

Rain at last! Finally, in September there was a month with above average rainfall, albeit only very slightly above and, of the month's 2½ inches, an inch fell in the last week. However, it did come and gardens have responded with a late flowering of plants such as hardy fuscias. The amount, however, will not have been enough to penetrate the soil to the underground water basins so care in the use of water will still be needed.

The summer months of June to August had over an inch below average rain, receiving 5¾ inches, so it cannot be said to have been a particularly dry summer. However, following the previous dry months, the effect is much the same, leading to problems of water shortages and trees dying, the predicted global warming.

Two dry summers though do not yet indicate a real pattern.

Since October last year, every month has experienced below average rainfall – in January and May less than half the normal. This means that in the first nine months of the year there was less than 15 inches of rain, compared with an average of 20¾ inches. In 2003 there was an even lower total, less than 13½ inches. This led to the lowest annual rainfall locally since 1980, 23 inches. Unless autumn bring above the usual rainfall, 2005 looks like being a repeat of 2003. However, 2003 followed the second wettest October to December in local records, while 2005 follows only an average one. Pray for a wet winter if water supplies are to be adequate next year.

DIANA IWT

THE GARDEN CALENDAR

Your Garden in November

☼ Now is the time to clear away any spent growth and leave the garden reasonably tidy during the winter months. Don't overdo it, though. The birds need to find seeds and berries – rosehips, teasels, viburnum, and rowan nurture them in the short, cold days ahead. An inverted dustbin lid on three bricks with a candle underneath on the coldest nights will provide drinking water and somewhere to splash their feathers clean.

☼ Sweep up leaves into plastic bags or leave in a heap. In 18 months you will have masses of free leaf-mould to feed your garden. Send the lawnmower for its annual service and clean and oil your tools.

☼ Keep an eye on stored dahlia tubers, chrysanthemum stools and fruits and discard any that are rotting or mouldy. Over-wintering tender plants in greenhouses and cold frames will also need a weekly inspection.

☼ It's not too late to plant outdoor hyacinths, tulips and lilies. Bare-rooted roses, shrubs and trees can go in all winter, but after a frost you may need to press the soil back down around newly planted trees and shrubs.

Your Garden in December

☼ It's pruning time. In frost-free weather, cut out all dead diseased and damaged wood from established trees and shrubs. But be careful - because the Suburb is a conservation area, you have to give Barnet Council planners six weeks' notice before you prune any tree unless they are less than 7.5 cms. in diameter, measured 1.5m. above the ground. Tree fines vary from £20,000 to £2,500!

☼ It's gardening-in-the-head time, curled up in front of a log fire, roasting chestnuts and planning next year's seed and bulb orders. Here are three of my favourite catalogues: Jekka's Herb Farm, 01454 418878, www.jekkasherbfarm.com; David Austin Roses, 01902 376300, www.davidaustinroses.com; Jacques Armand Bulbs, 020 8420 7110.

Your Garden in January

☼ Cover cold frames on frosty nights with old carpet and tuck fleece round the plants. Ventilate by day, but remember to close them down at night.

☼ Spray fruit trees with tar oil winter wash to kill over wintering pests. Cut off suckers from the base of apple and pear trees.

☼ Plan a new herb garden and order your seeds and plants for spring delivery.

☼ HAPPY NEW GARDENING YEAR!

Chelsea Diary

By the time you read this HGS Horticultural Society entry for Chelsea Flower Show 2006 will have been submitted. We were fortunate to obtain the services of two recent graduates from the KLC School of Interior and Garden Design in Chelsea Harbour, Janet Lynam and Lorna Walker. They have produced a wonderful contemporary small garden with amazing features including a wonderful water feature. A major sponsor will cover most of the costs and a local estate agent has promised £1000 as well. We will not know if it has been accepted until November so fingers crossed.

Our president Jonathan Ross has promised to open it for us if his TV commitments allow.

I hope that all this hard work by our small committee of three will pay off and will result in us winning a medal next year.

Full details of how we get on and what the garden is called will be in the next *Suburb News*.

MICHAEL FRANKLIN
DIANE BERGER
GERARD WISEMAN

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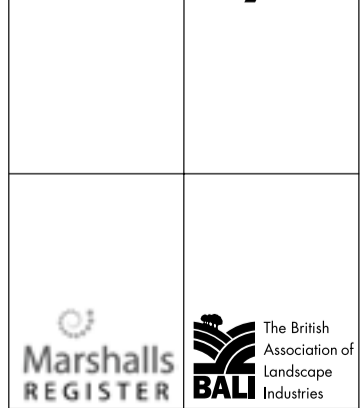
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