

The country house garden

Some gardens are swanky – full of brilliantly schemed flower beds and artful features – they revel in the notoriety of open days and win prizes in competitions. Sue Rees' garden in Hampstead Way isn't one of those. It is Sue's private Eden, where she is happy pottering, planting and planning next year's new plant combinations. The end result is a beautifully crafted garden, full of interest in every season of the year.

When she first saw the garden the grass under the fruit trees was 3 feet tall, ground elder and tansey swamped the narrow borders, there was no hedge at the front of the house and a very sparse one in the back, and woody old Peace roses were climbing 15 feet up into Dame Henrietta's pear tree.

250 hedge plants and 20 years later, Sue has created a lovely traditional garden, with a central lawn surrounded by closely planted herbaceous borders. She admits her ideas on planting have been influenced by Marjorie Fish, Vita Sackville-West and Robin Lane-Fox.

Her parents, living in the USA, fostered her early interest in gardening and they continue to swap ideas and suggestions. The Suburb has supplied many influences as well as a wonderful gardening neighbour who was willing to exchange plants and ideas, and friends from the Horticultural Society. Sue was a committee member for 16 years, 13 as Show secretary, and feels that each member added to her gardening knowledge.

Sue loves gardening in England, in spite of our cold, wet winters. "In early spring, I garden a lot, one or two hours nearly every day. It's so easy; the hours just slip by. In the summer I start early and probably spend two or three hours working before it gets too hot. Towards the end of the year, I'm still gardening because I am tidying up, cutting down the borders, weeding but leaving some seed heads for the birds." Sue does all the work herself, apart from help with cutting the hedges, usually her husband's task. "There is nothing so satisfying as a weed-free bed, even if your knees creak as you get up, at the end of a day's gardening." There speaks a true gardener.

Over the years, Sue has dug in great quantities of grit to lighten the heavy clay, deter slugs and keep the soil moist. If you fancy joining the gravel brigade, CPL will deliver to your door; (ring 0845 678 9955 for details). Another secret of her success is what Sue calls 'close gardening', planting everything very close



together to reduce evaporation from the soil. She is philosophical about failure: "As the garden matures, you understand which plants actually like your garden, your soil and then you build on that. I have tried numerous times to grow witch hazel, daphne mezereum and magnolia stellata but those plants refuse to thrive in this garden, so I have to leave them out and find something else – I am always experimenting."

A wide Yorkstone terrace that spans the back of this Edwardian house is full of pots with horticultural treasures including succulents, lillies, cannas and agapanthus. Citrus and olive trees lend a Mediterranean feel with the scent of lemon blossom in the early spring. Two Brown Turkey figs as well as Rosa banksiae 'Lutea' are being trained against the house wall.

As you look out over the garden, mature fruit trees add grace and dignity to the traditional design. The planting is informal, but repeating box topiary emphasises the country house garden effect. In May, the oak pergola that stretches along the south side of the garden is breathtaking. A wisteria, almost as old as the house, has been trained along its length. On the supporting pillars, the beautiful apricot pink rose Lady Waterlow and a variety of clematis intermingle with the graceful soft mauve wisteria. The area is underplanted with small spring bulbs, hellebores,

you are met, during the early summer, with stately stands of delphiniums in every shade of blue, white and purple. The brash contrast provided by the tall orange globe trolius, with iris siberica of many colours and astrantia 'Hadspen Blood' underneath finishes the picture.

Other favourite combinations are the tree peonies underplanted with allium azureum and the hardy geraniums Russell Prichard and g.sanguineum-lancastrense and the floribunda rose 'Brown Velvet' whose cinnamon buds match the bark of the nearby acer griseum.

Asked for her top 10 plants, Sue lists hellebores, oriental poppies, dahlias, astrantia, campanulas, day lillies, helenium, penstemons, potentilla and hardy geraniums. She is also very keen on aster amellus varieties for late summer colour. These asters rarely suffer from mildew and 'King George' and a.frikartii are always reliable. Dependable garden shrubs that thrive on clay are viburnum, callicarpa, tree peony, holly, sweet box (sarcococca), winter-flowering honeysuckle, camellia and hardy fuchsia.

Sue's passion for plants combined with her pragmatic determination to work with the soil and conditions has produced a lovely Suburb garden.

ANNE CRAWLEY

camassia, snakeshead fritillaria and a silvery iris that matches the wisteria.

WOW! Walk on past the fish pond (netted to foil herons) and



THE GARDEN CALENDAR

Your Garden in Autumn

- ☼ Plant lilies & spring bulbs such as crocuses, daffodils, hyacinth, scilla & winter aconites. Leave tulips until November to reduce the risk of fungal disease.
- ☼ If frost is forecast, harvest tender veg. such as chillies, courgettes, tomatoes and peppers.
- ☼ Lift, clean and store dahlias once their leaves have been blackened by frost.
- ☼ Take 8cm cuttings of tender perennials: Penstemon, Coleus, Fuchsia, Pelargonium & Verbena.
- ☼ Scarify lawns and apply an autumn fertilizer.
- ☼ Cut down spent perennials, remove frosted annuals, lightly fork borders and apply a bark mulch.
- ☼ Clear fallen leaves from borders, lawns & gullies. Compost in black, plastic bags to make leafmould.

HGS Horticultural Society Flower Show

On the blazing hot Saturday afternoon of June 17, Jonathan Ross and Jane Goldman, accompanied by their daughter Honey and Jane's mother, took the Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society's summer show visitors by storm. They had come to judge the six scarecrows propped menacingly in the Free Church Hall garden in Northway. While all the scarecrows were obviously doing a grand job – there was not a bird to be seen – the Ross family went into a huddle to try and sort out which one should win first prize. Jonathan himself liked them all and was very reluctant to make the choice. In fact he was all in favour of giving everyone a first. Persuaded by Society chairman, Marjorie Harris, that this was not an option, the family finally chose a first, second and third and also gave a 'highly commended' to two others and a 'commended' to the baby scarecrow made by 11-month old Camille Wiseman and her father Gerard, despite the fact that it was branded as the one Jonathan Ross would least like to meet on

a dark night in Hampstead Garden Suburb.

First prize went to the Ruffy family, whose very large greenish scarecrow had obviously had a lot of work and thought put into it. Second was the Boye family's piratical scarecrow, complete with ear-ring, and Horticultural Society member Daphne Holton and her grand-daughter came third with their traditional-looking scarecrow standing ready for action on a garden fork. Highly-commended were the Hamerton family and the Dunsmore family, whose Long John Silver-type scarecrow was bang up to the minute in that it had a football for a head.

Pearl McLean-Jennings, aged 5, swept the board with firsts in the other children's classes at the show and received her prize from Jonathan Ross too. Diane Berger, Ken Murrell, Chris Page, Gill Read and Marjorie Harris received 'best in category' certificates for their flowers, vegetables, fruit, pot plants and domestic economy, with Gill Read also taking the 'best in show' certificate.



Jonathan Ross recognises a good hairstyle when he sees it!



Dr Cynthia Rowbury and prize-winning Pia Duran.

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- Relax in it?
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- Cut flowers from it?
- Grow plants & vegetables in it?

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