



Colour in a cold climate

A glorious profusion of bold flowers and swaying grasses, fragrant roses and elegant pleached fruit trees define a garden in the far north of England

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THIS PICTURE Pleached crab apples mark the boundary of the kitchen garden with the herbaceous borders, where orange helenium contrasts with purple salvia, and ox-eye daisies thrive alongside a froth of green *Alchemilla mollis*



THE GARDEN

- **Style** Formal country • **Size** Half an acre plus orchard
- **Season of interest** Summer • **Soil** Imported loam

Soft and pretty is not a description you would generally associate with a garden in Northumberland. It's the English county with the coldest average temperatures, wide open skies and rugged landscapes where cutting winds sweep down from the Cheviots, so you expect something rather hunkered down and filled with tough survivors.

Patricia Green's beautiful garden, a few miles from Alnwick, defies these expectations. Partially enclosed by buff stone walls, it has a distinctly feminine feel, from the slender tracery of the pleached crab apples enclosing the kitchen garden to the borders overflowing with an abundance of flowers and grasses. These plantings are punctuated by Irish yews that stand in unexpected – but surprisingly effective – contrast to the frothiness at their feet.

In 2003, however, the house was semi-derelict and surrounded by farm buildings in a similar condition – and there was nothing that even remotely resembled a garden. But it stood on a farm that belongs to Patricia's family and, as she was in need of a bolthole from a busy working life, she decided to take up the challenge. "I knew what I liked, but didn't know how to put it together," she says. As luck would have it, family friend and garden designer Justin Spink happened to be working on a project nearby. "It was a fun process and Justin managed to transform how I feel about certain plants. Previously I hated hot colours – now I love them."

They began by removing the roofs of the farm buildings, leaving most of the remaining walls in place, and repairing them to form three incredibly sheltered enclosures that now form the heart of the garden. As they were adapting an existing space rather than starting from scratch, there was a bit of a problem with the levels, but creating flowerbeds in the upper garden and laying the lower area to lawn resolved this. The other walled enclosure contains the kitchen garden and Justin had originally planned to mark its boundary with low-growing espaliered fruit trees, but when he found the pleached 'Red Sentinel' crab apples, he couldn't resist.

The introduction of the Irish yews was inspired by the Cottage Garden at Sissinghurst, although Patricia took some persuading. "I was worried about how they would look," she explains, "but they have thrived. There is an informal symmetry about them, with different shrubs and roses encircling each one." Irish yews do have a tendency to spread at their base, rather spoiling their ▷





OPPOSITE Pink Rosa 'Blairii Number Two' flourishes by an inviting seat.
THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN PICTURE Red crocosmia and monarda mix with yellow ligularia in a border; pleached crab-apple trees; *Monarda* 'Fireball'; Japanese anemone 'September Charm'

GARDENING



Italianate appearance, but Justin has devised an unusual solution – he uses stockings to tie the branches close to the trunk.

Given that both the yews and crab apples have their heads well above the protecting walls, they've proved remarkably resilient in many a gale. "It is so exposed that it's gratifying that anything grows," Justin says. Before they tackled the garden itself, they planted a shelter belt of trees, partly to screen views of telegraph poles but also to filter the wind, which can be unrelenting. Despite these precautions, inevitably some plants haven't survived: it's not unexpected that *Melianthus major* hated the Northumbrian winter, yet other reputedly tender specimens have flourished, including *Romneya coulteri* – the Californian tree poppy.

Justin was a guiding hand in the early days of the garden, yet as it has grown and matured, Patricia has gained the confidence to let it evolve into a place that feels her own. "I'm quite lazy about controlling what grows," she says. "I love the bright pink blooms of *Lychnis coronaria*, so I let it pop up everywhere, and *Rosa* 'Sir Cedric Morris' is covering the east wall of the house." But she is generous in her praise of Justin. "One of his most inspired ideas was to soften the driveway, which has farm buildings on either side, using *Euphorbia wulfenii*, cistus and acanthus in the gravel to break up all the greyness." A favourite planting of hers is the dry area next to the house, where there is a very successful grouping of aromatic varieties that you might not think would thrive in Northumberland – phlomis, sage and rosemary.

Plans for the future include introducing more evergreens: "I'm trying to create a box cloud in a place that Justin and I didn't agree on initially," Patricia says. "He wanted a water feature, but I didn't like the idea and it ended up as a bed for leftover plants. Then I put a sculpture there but that didn't work and eventually I agreed on the box, which is now starting to establish itself." You get a sense that there have been some enjoyably spirited exchanges in the process of creating the garden but that it has all worked out fine in the end. "I asked Justin for a colourful garden," Patricia says, "and that's exactly what I have." 🌸

Justin Spink can be contacted on 01793 791838 or at justinspink.com.



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE High stone walls shelter the neat kitchen garden; *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty'; *Clematis* 'Etoile Violette'; *Rosa* 'Blairii Number Two'. OPPOSITE *Lilium martagon*, known as Turk's cap lily, creates an elegant display with mauve *Veronica spicata*





8 PRETTY PLANTS FOR PROBLEM PLACES

- *Lychnis coronaria* – rose campion; vivid pink flowers above silver leaves; self-seeds readily
- *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer' – spikes of fiery scarlet trumpet-shaped flowers and bright-green leaves
- *Monarda didyma* – aromatic bergamot with topknots of pink or red blooms popular with bees
- *Stipa gigantea* – golden oats; evergreen grass with fountain-like golden-flowering stems
- *Romneya coulteri* – grey-green leaves and poppy-like flowers with yellow centre; needs space
- *Stachys lanata* – furry silvery foliage; does well in poor soil; looks best if trimmed regularly and dead-headed before the flowers set seed
- *Papaver orientale* – stunning blooms; does well in poor, well-drained soil; cut back after flowering
- **Hardy geraniums** – great in tough conditions; varieties like 'Rozanne' flower all summer long