

Courting Favour...

A Mediterranean-style courtyard has been created at a Georgian rectory near Basingstoke this summer.

I was tasked by my clients to redesign the old kitchen yard on the northeast side of the property into an intimate and formal walled garden with lushly planted beds, topiary and features that would suggest the warmer climes of Italy or the south of France.



The new 2.4m high walls completely enclose the courtyard, providing a sheltered microclimate that will allow half standard Olive trees (*Olea europea*), myrtle and other tender perennials to thrive.

Other features include a specially cast bronze lion head mask water feature, Italian terracotta pots and cedar-clad raised beds filled with a combination of herbaceous perennials and shrubs. I chose a calming colour scheme based on pink, purple and white shades for these beds.

In the bed on the north eastern side of the property, there are shade-tolerant evergreen shrubs and ferns that will provide year-round interest.



Gardening is Child's Play...



^ Gather round

The storyteller's chair had been commissioned and so I designed a semi-circular classroom around it



<From small acorns...

The oakleaf carved table and leaf seats were designed into a secluded space under the canopies of beech and sycamore

I worked with an enthusiastic team at Hardmoor Early Years Centre in Bassett Green, Southampton this spring to transform a dull and shady corner of the playground into a vibrant sensory garden for the young people at the Centre.

Karen, the Centre manager, and Denise and Emma, the two dynamos in the gardening team, had created moodboards and a wishlist of items for the garden and I helped to design a working layout within the space available. I also put them in touch with local contractors, Marc Waterman and Ollie Fletcher who built the garden.

A key feature of the new garden is the story-teller's chair and circular outdoor classroom. A second seating area is nestled further into the wooded area and contains an oak leaf carved table and leaf shaped seats.

Yes, We Have Bananas

Emerging from the rigours of the past winter, I was thrilled to see that one of the pseudostems on my seven year old banana thicket had produced a fruiting pod!

Tiny yellow fruits have followed this summer but as the banana (*Musa basjoo*) is monocarpic, this stem will die back after fruiting.



Blue Sky Thinking...

I love looking at the sky. The clouds provide a never ending circus of curious shapes and patterns and I'm getting better at naming the different types of clouds because the classification system is based on the Linnaeus system we use in horticulture.

It might seem strange for a gardener to be looking up instead of down, but I've been noticing a few odd things up there over recent times. Have you noticed how many contrails (condensation trails from jet engines) seem to linger for hours, often spreading to cover the sky and sun?

This haziness was really apparent to me last summer, particularly early in the morning, and with sunshine in short supply, they seemed to add to the general gloom.

Are these trails affecting our climate? It appears that it's a complicated story and not yet fully understood.

Dr. Richard Hamblyn, in his excellent book, *'The Cloud Book: How To Understand The Skies'* explains further: "Contrails can, at first, have a cooling effect on the earth but as they spread to form layers of cirriform cloud, their overall effect becomes warming."

Contrails can only form when the air is cold and moist, so perhaps it's no surprise that I saw lots of them last year – apparently, moist air in the upper atmosphere is a good indicator that rain is on the way.

www.nhbs.com/the_cloud_book_tefno_157417.html

> Trail Blazing

Aircraft contrails criss-crossing the sky above Ropley early one morning. Could they be affecting our usual weather patterns?



v Magenta Divine

Phormium 'Evening Glow' has unusual bands of raspberry, cherry pink and magenta-red running lengthways along the large, strappy leaves

True To Form

My favourite plant of the year so far has to be *Phormium 'Evening Glow'*. It works well as a strong focal point in almost any type of border, but perhaps best in a smoky, sultry theme with chocolate browns, purples, oranges and scarlets. It has the most luminous bands of raspberry pink and cherry running lengthways along large strap-like leaves, which shine even on the dullest days.

Underplanted with creeping thyme, *Thymus serpyllum* or *Salvia 'Icterina'*, these limey-greens work well with the *Phormium* as they provide a zesty, energetic quality to the scheme. Other planting companions include *Fuchsia 'Genie'*, *Heuchera 'Purple Petticoats'*, *Penstemon 'Rich Ruby'*, *Choisya ternata 'Goldfinger'*, *Buddleja globosa* and *Cotinus coggygria 'Royal Purple'*.



Cuttings...

Beyond the Pail

A gardener on Anglesey has found a novel method for keeping the snail population down. She collects the snails she finds in her garden, puts them in a bucket and fattens them up with lots of lettuce, cabbage and apple. She then cooks and eats them. (Source: *The Independent*, 15.04.09)

Rat Rate Rockets

The UK rat population is on the rise and recent changes to gardening practices are in the spotlight. Could our burgeoning composting practices, bird-feeding habits and even our love of decking be nurturing this serious and hazardous development?

Placing chicken wire under a heap, siting the compost bin on concrete blocks, understanding how to compost properly and ensuring lids of food waste digestion systems (e.g. Bokashi Bins) are secured can all help. Further information at: www.greencone.com and www.leangreenhome.co.uk

Town Sows, Mows, Hoes and Grows its Own

A small town in Yorkshire aims to grow all its food by 2018. Find out more about the efforts of residents in Todmorden at: www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk

Moonlighting

More biodynamic experimentation this spring – melons, basil and beans were sown at different moon times. Unfortunately, part of the experiment succumbed to slugs and snails. But not before it was possible to notice that germination was quicker and more prolific in those sown at the 'correct' time. Interestingly, the snails seemed to prefer the seedlings that had been sown at the 'wrong' time! An information sheet is available on the website.

150 Not Out

During an archiving activity in the spring, I recorded more than 150 design consultations, design projects and commissions carried out since 1999. This total includes those projects where I have made a site visit, provided written or drawn design advice and produced a design. It doesn't include telephone or web enquiries or incidental design advice that didn't result in a site visit or drawing.

A heartfelt thank you to all my clients, past and present, for entrusting me with the task of realising their dreams and aspirations in their gardens and outdoor spaces.

It's been, and continues to be, a huge privilege.

What's New on the Website

Gardens 2 Visit – 5 downloadable pdf articles of favourite gardens across the south coast and Wales. More to follow.

5 x 5 Gallery – gallery of very small garden designs, under 25 sq.m. along with client brief and before and after pictures.

Articles – I've added several new articles across the site on gardening topics triggered by conversations with clients.

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