

FROM THE EDITOR

Hello, and welcome to this autumn's pick of the crop. It's been a year of ups and downs here on Exmoor - our prairie-inspired garden has burgeoned and provided rich, light-infused colour for months on end. But it's been touched with sadness, as in June I lost my closest gardening friend, Gill, to cancer.



Having a shared interest with someone can often lead to a deeper connection than simple friendship. I first met Gill in 1994 when she took me on as her gardener, for one morning a week. A short time later, she and her husband moved to an Elizabethan thatched house, and Gill and I set about creating a garden to suit the setting. We removed a large rectangle of lawn and planted a box-hedged parterre, filling the pattern with herbs of all kinds. A rose garden was laid out, and long herbaceous borders opened up. Our enthusiasm for the project was kindled by discussion as we chewed over design ideas and plant combinations.

When, ten years later, my back began to complain too loudly and I had to give up gardening professionally, Gill and I took to visiting gardens and nurseries together, discussing plants and gossiping about our families over lunch, always interested in what the other was doing. Moving house again, Gill created a white garden, the restricted palette emphasising the importance of foliage in the design. I opened my own garden for the NGS over several years and Gill was there without fail, manning the plant stall.

We didn't always see eye-to-eye on matters horticultural (I'll never forget turning up for a gardening session to find a caramel-coloured heuchera near the back door and wondering how on earth we would integrate it into the border), but we influenced each other's attitudes and choices.

Gardening is an optimistic occupation - we live in hope that seeds will germinate, that plants won't be devoured by slugs, or blow over, or rot. It is a joyful part of life, full of colour, scent and light. Fellow gardeners are familiar with its fragile nature and share the same creative spirit. As Gill said to me on my final visit to her in the hospice, 'Don't be sad, I've had a good life. I made gardens!'

Marion Jay