

The journal editor came to visit our garden in March, on his way to the HPS lecture day and AGM in East Yorkshire, and asked if I would write something about it for this issue. So here goes.

Our land extends to about four acres, two of which we garden, some parts more intensively than others as my husband Richard likes to leave lots of wild areas for birds and insects. The farther from the house, which is next to the road, the wilder it gets (fig. 1).

We moved here in 2002 from a garden of one third of an acre, which we had opened for two years for the National Garden Scheme (NGS). Richard

was about to retire and only the youngest of our five children was still at home, so at last I had time to do more gardening! The garden is situated in a strange mix of industrial and rural countryside. We have heavy lorries pounding past during the week but at other times it is very quiet, and we have a good and interesting variety of birds. The land is flat but unlike the East Ruston Old Vicarage Garden in Norfolk, who are able to frame a church or lighthouse with their hedges, all we have is a power station!

It was the size of the garden that attracted us; the previous owners had

## Space to plan and plant

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bought extra land for their horses, so we could see the potential to expand the garden. The existing garden had been planted a long time ago around what was its original boundary, with various trees, conifers and shrubs, some of which were still valiantly growing despite prolonged neglect.



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Fig. 1 View from the house



Fig. 2 The long double borders

We had holly, laurel, privet, juniper, yew, a copper beech, a lime, cedars, various old fruit trees, a hawthorn hedge and lots and lots of brambles. One of the cedar trunks was almost buried by grass clippings, and a large area of grass had been used as a permanent bonfire site. There was a narrow south-facing border of sorts in front of a part of the hawthorn hedge.

We had propagated lots of plants from our previous garden, which we were allowed to store in the new one. Then, a couple of days before we were due to move in, there was an explosion in the kitchen which blew out most of the downstairs windows, the conservatory and some ceilings! So we started work in the garden straightaway,

as a team of builders began to repair the house.

I badly wanted long, wide, double borders which we could look out on to from the house, so that was where we began. Richard did all the measurements and laid out the beds, his abilities at measuring etc. being much better than mine, though he is rather keen on straight lines. Fortunately these are offset by lots of the other shapes within the garden.

Richard is also rather good at making compost on a large scale. We use all the garden waste with added contributions from the hens, the horses next door and the pigeons in the next village. We apply it liberally on the beds and in planting holes, as our soil is sandy, very stony and dry.

We often have long spells with very little rainfall and I sometimes long for a wet plot in Wales, but I suppose that would have its drawbacks too.

The double borders are about 45m long and 4m wide, with each length divided into three sections for access (fig.2). We decided to use beech to hedge behind them, and we had learnt from our previous garden that it's best to have a path between the hedge and the back of the border to facilitate cutting and access.

The beds and hedges were marked out and work began nearest the house. The beds were rotavated and then had the church's old carpets (just the right width for borders) put on them to keep the grass and weeds at bay.



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Fig. 3 Island bed is former bonfire site



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Fig. 4 Bog garden

One of our hardest jobs was removing the part of the old hawthorn hedge that crossed the borders in the middle, where the land rises slightly. Fortunately the only child still living at home was our son, and his muscle power came in handy. The beds were planted out with the plants we had brought with us, and new purchases and gifts from friends and acquaintances (among which some plants I'm still trying to remove – perhaps there is a case for looking a gift-horse in the mouth after all). Gradually they filled up the available space, although they took a long time to mature.

Around this time we began work on the fairly shady garden to the east of the house, digging two long narrow beds to house my snowdrop collection, which we had brought with us in pots. This collection has expanded over the



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Fig. 5 Gravel garden

years to around 200 named snowdrops and now extends to other parts of the garden – mainly the woodland and an area behind the gravel garden.

The rest of the garden seemed to evolve naturally rather than by design, and we tackled each new area by working around what

was already there. We eventually did remove a few trees and shrubs that we could not work around. The brambles were removed to create a woodland area under the trees; the old bonfire site became an island bed (fig. 3); we added a bog garden (fig. 4)



Fig. 6

and a gravel garden (fig. 5); extended the south-facing bed (fig. 6); and planted lots and lots of hedges.

We first opened the garden for the NGS in 2005, and we still do; our area organiser was very encouraging and thought that people would be interested to see a garden under development. We have visitors who still remember

how small the hedges were back then.

Richard works very hard, in summer anyway, cutting the grass and later the hedges. He also grows vegetables but is far from fanatical – his greatest love is his hens! I just like growing and planting things, trying different combinations and unusual plants. Some I grow from seed, some are bought on trips out, from

Fig. 7 *Orlaya grandiflora*

visiting nurseries at HPS meetings or the odd flower show. I also order plants in spring by mail order from Elizabeth MacGregor Nursery and have bought a lot over the years from Cally Gardens when Michael Wickenden was there. Cotswold Garden Flowers, and my local nurseries Stillingfleet Lodge and Dove Cottage are also well represented.

Fig. 8 *Phyteuma nigrum*Fig. 9 *Cornus kousa* 'John Slocock'

I like growing lots of different annuals. People are very dismissive of them, and hardly ever buy them on our plant stall, but there are lots of lovely ones and, though not always hardy, they can appear spontaneously in subsequent years in the most unexpected and pleasing places. Admittedly though, some can be a nuisance – you only want so many *Nicandra physalodes* in the garden – but plants like *Orlaya grandiflora* (fig. 7) and *Phyteuma nigrum* (fig. 8) are always welcome. It amazes me how well plants that seed themselves perform: my best astrantia is a seedling in a crack in the paving outside the greenhouse, and we have geraniums, euphorbias, smyrnium, phuopsis, alchemilla, corydalis and even a sarcococca all making themselves at home in various places.

Having a large garden is hard work but it provides the opportunity to grow a wide variety of plants. We have quite a lot of different trees in the garden. Growing quite close together are *Cornus kousa* 'John Slocock' (fig. 9) and *Chionanthus virginicus* (fig. 10), which have both flowered exceptionally well this year. In the front garden is *Ptelea trifoliata* 'Aurea' (fig. 11). However, hardy perennials are what interest me most. We have a large collection: lots of easy ones, some more tricky customers and some absolute pests.

My dictamnus have made a good show this year with *D. albus* var. *purpureus* and one I bought as *D. a.* var. *turkestanicus* both doing well – the latter billed at the time by Cally Gardens as a 'rare variety, stronger growing with larger pink flowers on larger heads', which it has (fig. 12) – but the name has now fallen out of use. I have a bulb in my south-facing border named *Scilla hyacinthoides* (fig. 13) which has flowered for the first time – I bought it five years ago from Bob Brown! *Delphinium* 'Sweet Sensation' (fig. 14) has also performed well.

Visitors often like the gravel garden best. It is not lined, so plants seed around and some take a lot of controlling, such as *Verbena bonariensis*, which is just too much of a good thing in there. In June, *Nepeta prattii* and *Artemisia alba* 'Canescens' (fig. 15) are looking interesting.



Fig. 10 *Chionanthus virginicus*



Fig. 11 *Ptelea trifoliata* 'Aurea'



Fig. 12 *Dictamnus* bought as *D. albus* var. *turkestanicus*

Fig. 13 *Scilla hyacinthoides*

There is a pond in the gravel, and a lot of grasses which grow very tall by the end of summer; and salvias do well. At the moment *Linaria triornithophora* (fig. 16) is running around. In the island bed *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Whitley Major' (fig. 17) is covered in white flowers – which risk being spoiled by

Fig. 16 *Linaria triornithophora*Fig. 14 *Delphinium* 'Sweet Sensation'

the long-awaited rain!

There have been many changes over the years, but the garden is now properly divided up by the hedges – so much so that visitors sometimes get lost. Time has passed quickly, all our children are now married with children of their own; and eleven grandchildren and

Fig. 15 *Nepeta prattii* & *Artemisia alba* 'Canescens'

one new hip later I am still a keen gardener, though my hours on task are somewhat reduced. It's the successes and failures (of which there have been many) that maintain interest, and I couldn't do it without Richard's (usually!) willing assistance. He empties my wheelbarrow with endless patience. 🐝

Fig. 17 *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Whitley Major'

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