



*cotswold garden*

# A place in the country

Lush planting fills the small garden of a honey-coloured farmhouse in the Cotswolds

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## In brief

WHAT Small private garden surrounded by farmland.

WHERE The Cotswolds.

SIZE A ¼-acre garden, with 14 acres of pasture and orchard.

SOIL Heavy clay, with wet areas. CONDITIONS Usually sheltered but some cold winds in winter; regular rainfall.

SPECIAL FEATURES Traditional Cotswold garden palette given a contemporary, adventurous edge.

GARDEN PLAN See page 90.

Open pasture sweeps around the house, and inspires the natural look of much of the planting in the small garden.







Designers Chris and David used subtle colours for the planting around the terrace, drawing the eye to the countryside beyond.



The soft pink flowers of *Rosa* 'Climbing Lady Sylvia' tumble from a wall, releasing their delicious scent.

The Cotswolds have an important place in British garden design history – this is home to gardens such as Hidcote and Kiftsgate that have made a huge impact on how we think about, design and plant our gardens. Many of these gardens owe much to the Arts and Crafts tradition, with its hedged garden rooms, rustic and theatrical topiary and fulsome borders.

At first sight it looks as if Mill Close shares the same influences – an old yew clipped to a drum shape, for example, by the side of the house. But this is a firmly contemporary garden; the fruit of a collaboration between a 'design and maintain' partnership and the owners, Antonia Johnson, head of a Swedish family business, and her husband Göran Ennerfelt.

This garden lies at the foot of the Cotswold escarpment. It's only a quarter of an acre, but is part of a 14-acre property that includes an old and partially replanted orchard, as well as rough grazing land. The soil is heavy clay, much given to slippage, so the land is picturesquely lumpy. More than 1,000 tonnes of soil and building debris were removed to lower one hillock, and now the top of the escarpment can be seen from the terrace at the

rear of the house. The local landscape is an integral part of the garden's *raison d'être*, as the owners bought the house to serve as a base for walking holidays in the Cotswolds.

#### Blended planting

Designers Chris Dent and David McKinney started work here in 2002. "We had a totally free hand," says Chris, "but the clients are very design-aware, and have sculptors and craftspeople among their friends, so we feel that our design was informed by Antonia's ideas."

"We have had some pretty lively discussions," says Swedish-born Antonia. "I come from a culture where we like to draw a diffuse and imaginary border between real nature and tame nature, so you don't know where the garden ends and nature begins."

To help blend the garden into the scenery, Chris and David used wildflower seed mixes in some areas and planted native trees and shrubs just beyond the garden. Wild cherries (*Prunus avium* and *P. padus*), common in the neighbourhood, were an important choice. The essence of their style focuses on strong design filled out with a range of interesting plants, many unusual, sourced from specialist nurseries. ▷



The curves of an antique urn provide a counterpoint to the clean straight edges of the rill.



Herbaceous plants including mauve *Delphinium Astolat* Group and pink *Persicaria bistorta* 'Superba' sparkle against the rich green of a yew hedge.



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A blossom-laden snowball tree, *Viburnum opulus* 'Roseum', shelters an old iron bench.





Foxgloves and veronicastrums swirl around a standard bay perched on a twisted stem.



The rich purple flowers of *Sanguisorba menziesii* shine intensely amid dark foliage.



A rustic pathway weaves through the Ash Garden winds past tall grasses and *Allium stipitatum* 'Mount Everest'.

▷ The path to the front door leads through a semi-circular yew hedge, echoing the yew-tree drum, which is reflected again in small quarter-circle pools on either side of a paving 'bridge' over the rill that runs between the lawn and paving in front of the house.

Looking to the left there is a view straight up the rill that continues into the next part of the garden, just visible through a slit in the yew hedge. The border at the base of the hedge is filled with a variety of herbaceous perennials, amongst them delphiniums, hostas, aconitums, cranesbill geraniums and some hellebores.

#### Dark-leaved plants

The area west of the house features many dark-leaved plants, one being *Ligularia* 'Desdemona', which is dominant for much of the summer, while in the winter dark-leaved heucheras continue the theme. A path to a seat under the yew is carpeted with what looks like glossy black gravel, but is actually dark green glass chippings.

On the other side of the house, a narrow path leads through a contemporary perennial border; you have to brush past head-height grasses, mostly forms of *Miscanthus sinensis* and *Molinia caerulea*.

There's a variety of flowering perennials, some of which are included for combined flower and seedhead interest such as *Verbascum chaixii* 'Album' and the teasel-relative *Dipsacus inermis*. This area is called the Ash Garden, after the large ash tree that dominates the space.

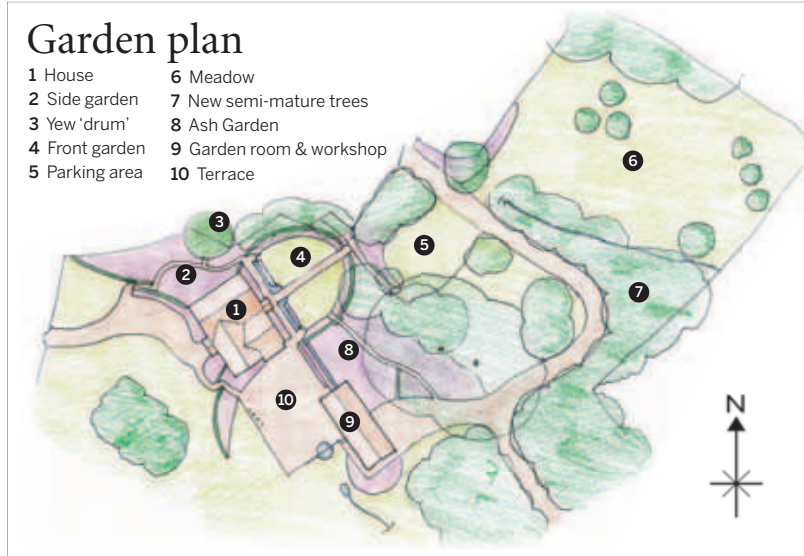
"We are also constantly playing with the area," says Chris. One intriguing plant here is *Tragopogon pratensis* subsp. *minor*, a local wildflower known as Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, its huge dandelion-like seedheads strikingly attractive, although, says Chris, "It seeds a lot and has to be watched." Antonia confesses that she did not like the area at first; now, she says, "I find it rather fun."

In contrast to the rich planting of other areas, the southeast-facing terrace at the rear feels relatively open and unadorned. Abstract or minimalist sculpture breaks the terrace's horizontal line, edged with a few low perennials and sub-shrubs; the eye is inevitably drawn upwards to the rolling fields and the skyline of the Cotswold ridge.

This is an intense little garden, quite exceptional for its combination of adventurous planting and elegant meeting of hedge, border, paving and water. With its use of stone, its heritage of yew and its outer belt of native planting it remains very much a genuinely Cotswold one. □

#### Garden plan

- |                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1 House        | 6 Meadow                 |
| 2 Side garden  | 7 New semi-mature trees  |
| 3 Yew 'drum'   | 8 Ash Garden             |
| 4 Front garden | 9 Garden room & workshop |
| 5 Parking area | 10 Terrace               |



#### Designer profile

Chris Dent (pictured above right) trained in landscape design in the UK and completed a scholarship at Jerusalem Botanic Gardens. David McKinney trained in horticulture at Askham Bryan in Yorkshire. They formed 'Plants and Gardens' 13 years ago, designing, building and maintaining gardens with adventurous planting. Tel 07785 743027, email pg@fireflyuk.net

PLAN BY PLANTS AND GARDENS



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“ This is an intense little garden, quite exceptional for its combination of adventurous planting and elegant meeting of hedge, border paving and water ”



Dots of white *Allium stipitatum* 'White Everest' appear as self-seeded drifts through a meadow-style planting that includes native species such as *Valeriana officinalis* and mixed grasses.