

Where to find INSPIRATION

If you find yourself staring at the garden, in need of new ideas, there's no better place to find them than the annual Chelsea Flower Show. Sally Brampton gets some suggestions from designer Jinny Blom

This is my favourite time of year in the garden. The sky is a pale, watered blue, the leaves a fresh, new green. All around us is an air of lovely promise, months and months of sunshine and flowers. I love it all but what I love best is the anticipation, the joy of planning the garden's summer form. Should it be brilliant this year, filled with saturated purples and bold reds? Or shall I go for a romantic, lyrical tangle of wildflowers and grasses? I stand in my garden and stare, feeling a yen for chalky blue delphiniums and buff apricot roses. I can't decide so I take myself off to Chelsea, to the annual flower show, which is a gardener's equivalent of the Paris collections.

I go to Chelsea every year because it is there, always, that I find inspiration. It could be an unexpected grouping of plants (clear pink roses growing through purple-stemmed grass), a sudden, surprising palette of colour (tangerine with violet) or even a winding flagstone path edged with thyme. I take a notebook and a camera, and then I come

home and experiment in my own garden. I am never literal; I use what works for me.

Just as I like particular fashion designers, so I love the work of particular garden designers. One is Jinny Blom, who is this year creating the Laurent-Perrier garden at Chelsea (visit jinnyblom.com). Her sensibility is incredibly female; a glorious relief after the masculine, hard-edged glass and concrete gardens we have seen so much of lately. I love her billowing, generous planting which is supremely romantic without being girly. She is also, in true *Easy Living* style, intensely practical. Her own garden is a typical long, narrow London plot. "I love gardening and flowers but I'm very busy. I took the lawn out at home because I hated coming back after a week away and feeling overwhelmed by having to cut the grass."

If there is any trend this year it is, she says, "gardens that work. Think about what you really need. If you entertain a lot, put aside enough space." Make the garden part of your life, don't see it as separate. And be adventurous. "If you really only hang out on the terrace, you can still do that decorating garden thing – just do it really big. Exaggerate. It's an old trick but if you take three absolutely massive pots and cram them full of plants it makes a substantial statement."


When she says massive she means at least a metre wide – a great idea because they need far less watering. It is a trick she has used for her garden at Chelsea, piling white tulips *purissima* into five huge pots. Her inspiration is France, a lyrical evocation of roses, irises and peonies with a crushed limestone path winding through a decorative meadow filled with grasses, foxgloves, geraniums and aquilegias, "a blend of nature and garden."

It is the colours that Jinny uses that I will be blatantly stealing from her. "I love misty, diffuse colours – lilac and violet, pale blues and mauvey greys. These sort of colours look amazing at dusk, when you're most likely to be in your garden."

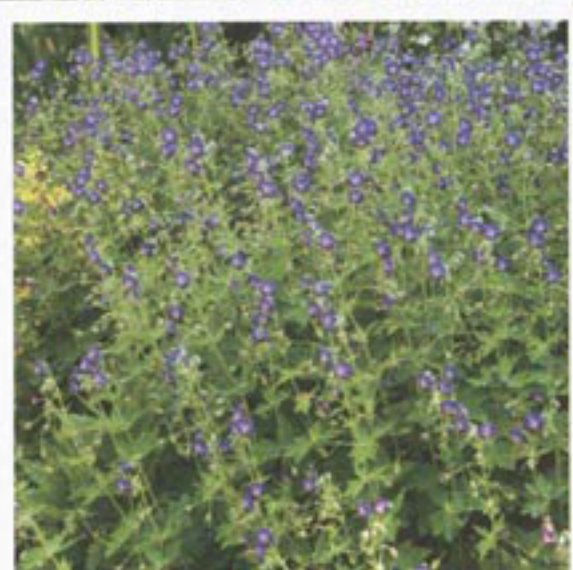
She uses a lot of hardy geraniums, useful plants for any garden because they come up year after year with →

Opposite: A garden designed by Jinny Blom, showing off her generous, romantic planting style. Below, left to right: the bright purple pom-poms of Alliums Purple Sensation; the vivid spikes of gladiolus byzantinus



A photograph of a garden path made of reddish-brown bricks laid in a herringbone pattern. The path is flanked by lush greenery and various flowers, including yellow and pink blooms. In the background, there is a wooden fence and a large tree. The sky is overcast.

“ Never be a snob about plants or
worry about what’s fashionable.
Everything is okay if used properly ”



Clockwise from top left: the long, delicate spikes of *Veronica Gentianoides* 'Tissington White'; slender white tulips *purissima* stand tall above their bed; the soft mauvey-grey flowers of *geranium phaeum* 'Lividum'

little effort. "My favourite is geranium 'Birch Lilac', which is the most beautiful lilac blue. It's quite low-growing so it throws up a pool of misted colour. Then there's geranium *phaeum* 'Lividum', which is a wonderful mauvey grey, and useful for shade which you find in most town gardens. I love *Veronica Gentianoides* 'Tissington White' too.

White can be very difficult in a garden as it can be too harsh but this has a lovely mauve-grey cast to the flower." Shape, too, is important. The veronica has long, delicate spikes that rise out of mounds of geraniums. And then there are those flowers that introduce a sudden, offbeat element. "I've found an extraordinary new rose called *Dioressence*, which is the weirdest colour lilac. It has extraordinary pointy buds and is just so 1950s. I predict everyone will go mad for it when they see it at Chelsea. And I've chosen a very peculiar iris, *Chartreuse Ruffles*, which is brilliant lime green shot with lilac – that mix of colour is absolutely, fantastically gorgeous."

Too much of one colour is a mistake in any garden. "All this misty mauve grey could look too maudlin so I use sparks of vivid colour dotted

through. I've threaded through a bright purple with *Alliums* 'Purple Sensation' and added flashes of electric pink with *gladiolus byzantinus*. I might even flick some scarlet about too."

Her main advice? "Use colour to really experiment. If you don't know your plants very well, look for colours that you love. We're all deeply affected by colour. Paint a room the wrong colour and it can send you around the bend. Never be a snob about plants or worry about what's fashionable. Everything is okay if used properly. Do what you love." ■

The 2006 RHS Chelsea Flower Show runs from Tuesday 23-Saturday 27 May (23/24 are RHS member days). Tickets cost from £17 to £39 and must be booked in advance. Call 0870 906 3781

WIN TICKETS TO THE CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW

Laurent-Perrier is offering three *Easy Living* readers the chance to win a pair of tickets to The 2006 RHS Chelsea Flower Show on Thursday May 25, followed by a Laurent-Perrier 'theatre tea' for two at The Savoy, a Fairmont Hotel, in London.

A combination of traditional afternoon tea and high tea, the Savoy's theatre teas include a selection of savouries, soups and desserts served in the historic Thames foyer. The tea will be accompanied by a bottle of deliciously fresh Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Brut (laurent-perrier.co.uk). Rooms at The Savoy, a Fairmont Hotel, start at £199 (call 020 7950 5492 for room reservations).

■ To enter, send your name, address and telephone number to *Easy Living/Laurent-Perrier Offer*, PO Box 5010, Yelvertoft, Northants NN6 6ZB by Friday May 12, 2006. The prize excludes transport. Terms and conditions apply (see stockists page).

How to do Chelsea-inspired at home

So, here's a chance to create a little bit of Chelsea at home. I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to play misty with lavenders, mauves and pale blues. To make things easier, I grabbed a list from Jinny of the plants that will be in her garden at the Chelsea Flower Show. Here's a selection:

ROSES

■ *Rose Reine Des Violettes* –

a soft lilac grey with touches of dusky purple.

■ *Rose chinensis Mutabilis* – soft orange changing to coppery pink.

Both of these are available from David Austin Roses. Visit davidAustinroses.com

IRIS

■ *Iris Chartreuse Ruffles* – pale lilac ruffles edged in lime.

■ *Iris Pink Angel* – palest blush

pink edged deep pink.

■ *Iris Secret Melody* – soft apricot and deep raspberry. *All available from Woottens Nursery. Call 01502 478258 or visit woottensplants.co.uk*

THE DECORATIVE MEADOW

■ *Deschampsia caespitosa* – tuft forming grass with airy flower spikes.

■ *Aquilegia 'Ruby Port'* –

double ruby-red flowers.

■ *Delphinium 'Tiddles'* – deep mauve double flowers.

■ *Geranium pratense 'Mrs Kendall Clark'* – pearl grey flowers.

■ *Digitalis albaflora* – the white foxglove.

■ *Rose Dioressence* – gorgeous lilac flowers. Numbers of this are limited so be quick! *All 'decorative meadow' plants available from crocus.co.uk*