

BBC

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# GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

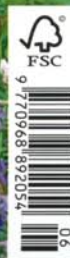
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## Cottage gardens

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CELEBRATING 150 ISSUES OF GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

# Ravishing beauty

Award-winning garden designer Jinny Blom goes starry eyed with her planting plan for a blissfully romantic flower border, perfect for a cottage garden – and just as appealing elsewhere. Illustration Hannah McVicar

I am hopelessly unfashionable, so being asked to create an 'unashamedly romantic' border was a delight. We have a tremendously benign climate in Britain; at least we do at the moment, and it's well worth relishing, even if it does drive one mad at times. Having lived on the Continent and on the Mediterranean I can vouch for the fact that the dramatic seasonal shifts from freezing cold to boiling hot make gardening there an absolute trial. There's no hope at all for a herbaceous border. Here, we are lucky; we have damp, loamy soils, variable temperatures and soft light from moisture-laden skies to make all our senses tingle.

This border comes into its own on dewy, misty early mornings in late May and early June, and in the early evening when the blues become ultraviolet and seem to hum in the lowering light.

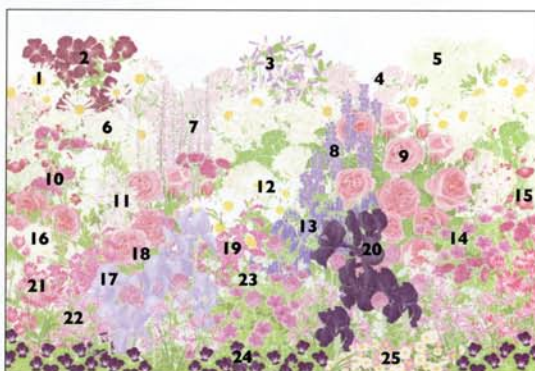
I am a strict 'spatialist' when making gardens, so all my borders are tightly designed and controlled with steel or paved edges. I can't bear mess where mess is not required and it drives me nuts if plants flop out over lawns in high summer and kill off the grass beneath. Have you tried mowing beneath flopped-over plants? Quite. I rest my case.

So before we get all breathy and flustered about the flowers, let's get the basics sorted out. I once made my beds at home 3.5m deep. I must have been mad. They are impossible to manage; a woman alone can only do so much. Now I'm more pragmatic. Frankly, GARDENS ILLUSTRATED dictated the bed size. I'd never make a bed this deep. Make them shallower – 1.8m at most – or if they are 3m deep, as this one is, make them accessible on all sides. If you do use these more manageable dimensions, make the shrubs central to the bed and put edging plants on all fronts.

## A healthy obsession

Another area I'm obsessed with, to the point of demonic possession, is preparing soil. You will only ever want to do it once, so do it properly. Ameliorate the soil with a layer of best-quality organic matter at least 10cm deep; make sure it's weed-free and don't use composted bark (I'm no scientist but the idea that it robs nitrogen from the soil has stuck). The plants and your winter-soft stomach muscles will thank you for the effort.

Actually, if you've dug-over well and weeded the border in winter, the act of planting will usually incorporate the spread of organic >





## Planting list

Jinny's list includes large shrubs, perennials and bulbs to flower in succession through summer. (See overleaf for quantities.)

### 1. *Leucanthemella serotina*

Vigorous daisy that flowers in autumn. Typically reaches a height of up to 1.5m. AGM†

### 2. *Clematis* 'Royal Velours'

Climber with small, bell-shaped, red-purple flowers, summer to early autumn. 2-4m. AGM.

### 3. *Clematis* x *tritemata*

'Rubromarginata' A vigorous climber that bears red-rimmed

white flowers between summer and early autumn. 3-6m. AGM

### 4. *Campanula lactiflora* 'Lodnon Anna'

Soft lilac-white flowers from early summer to early autumn. 1.2-1.5m. AGM.

### 5. *Clematis* 'White Moth'

Climber with white, bell-shaped, double flowers April-June. 2.5m.

### 6. *Hydrangea arborescens*

'Annabelle' Large shrub, bears greenish white flower heads up to 20cm across. 2.5m. AGM.

### 7. *Veronica* 'Pink Damask'

Bears spires of rose-pink flowers in July and August. 90cm.

### 8. *Aconitum* 'Bressingham Spire'

Deep violet flowers from

midsummer to early autumn. 1m. AGM. Caution: toxic.

### 9. *Rosa* 'Madame Knorr'

Reliable, vigorous, bushy rose with scented flowers in summer and autumn. 1.2m. AGM.

### 10. *Cirsium rivulare*

Thistle-like plant with crimson flower heads from early to midsummer. 1.2m.

### 11. *Verbascum blattaria* f.

*albiflorum* Spires hung with small white flowers, May to July. 1.2m.

### 12. *Leucanthemum vulgare*

The ox-eye daisy flowers in late spring and early summer. 90cm.

### 13. *Campanula* 'Sarastro'

Pendulous blue bells and large hairy leaves. 60cm.

### 14. *Geranium Patricia* (=

'Brempat') Bears magenta flowers in summer. 75cm. AGM.

### 15. *Lychnis coronaria*

Silver foliage, and magenta flowers in late summer. 80cm. AGM.

### 16. *Romneya coulteri*

The Californian tree poppy flowers all summer. 1-2.5m. AGM.

### 17. *Iris* 'Jane Phillips'

Pale blue flowers in May and June. AGM.

### 18. *Allium sphaerocephalon*

Flowers in summer. 90cm.

### 19. *Gladiolus communis* subsp.

*byzantinus* Fragrant flowers from

May to August. 90cm. AGM.

### 20. *Iris* 'Deep Black'

Scented flowers, May-August. 75cm.

21. *Astrantia* 'Roma' Flowers like soft pink pincushions from June to September. 50cm.

### 22. *Nerine bowdenii*

Pink lily-like flowers in autumn. 45cm. AGM.

### 23. *Viola cornuta* 'Alba'

Flowers in spring and summer. 15cm.

### 24. *Viola* 'Bowles's Black'

This short-lived perennial makes good ground cover at the front of the border (with 23). 15cm.

### 25. *Erigeron karvinskianus*

This pink and white daisy flowers all summer. 20cm. AGM.

†AGM – plant holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

“This is a reasonably well-structured mix of plants, with plenty of spires to give it lift and grace, nothing too stodgy and lots of prettiness”

▷ matter quite nicely, so there is really no need to martyr yourself.

Right: are you beautifully prepared, mulched, masterfully edged and ready for planting?

## Staying power

I adore all plants. My favourite borders have fewer flowers over a long season, rather than a big blast in June. I've been trying to get to grips with this for years, with a moderate degree of success.

Gardening is typified for me by annual serendipity combined with perennial mishap. That's the fun of it. I am past the point of using rare trinkets from a forgotten cleft of rock near Machu Pichu. These days I only plant good reliable things that are justifiably popular.

I am mad about colour and reasonably carefree with it, though the great Christopher Lloyd once told me my choices were 'far too tasteful'.

I like to choose plants that create a structurally strong yet visually soft backbone; *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' and *Rosa* 'Madame Knorr' are both great, indestructible, bug-free and beautiful. *Viola cornuta* 'Alba' will scramble through the rose, peering out from between the leaves. Creamy white and neon pink are a good start for the colours. Using the deep navy blue of *Campanula* 'Sarastro', *Aconitum* 'Bressingham Spire' and *Iris* 'Deep Black' tempers the pink and gives it substance. I have found the blue triggers the underlying violet in pink and makes it much more profound. Tremendous in its intensity is *Geranium* Patricia (= 'Bremprat') – it's a hard worker and not averse to being cut back if it gets out of bounds.

At the back of the border, or along its spine if it were free-standing, I'd plant *Leucanthemella serotina* and

*Campanula lactiflora* 'Loddon Anna'. If you are weak of character, don't plant *L. serotina*, the autumn ox-eye. It can be invasive, but I am firmly convinced of its place. In this and every border we need daisies, thuggish though they are. I have chosen three, from the sublime to the ridiculous.

I'd add the Californian tree poppy, *Romneya coulteri*. Sometimes the glaucous leaves jar in a border but I do so love its crazy, spontaneous habit and huge, crinkly flowers.

So: violas, *Iris* and *Erigeron* at the front. In the gaps in the near front, plant *Astrantia*, *Campanula*, *Lychnis* and so forth. In the bigger gaps towards the middle, and wrapping around the shrubs, are *Verbascum*, *Aconitum* and *Cirsium*. Pack it full of *Nerine* to take over from the irises in autumn. Both like to have their roots baked, so they are good mates. Add *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus* and *Allium sphaerocephalon* for the extra texture and pinkness to poke through the gaps. I do adore clematis and they can extend the season.

*Clematis x triternata* 'Rubromarginata' is mainly there for its gorgeous scent.

This is a reasonably well-structured mix of plants, with plenty of spires to give it lift and grace, nothing too stodgy and lots of prettiness, without being fey. In terms of management I'd just keep an eye on the smotherers and chop them back after flowering, mainly the ox-eye daisy. Violas and erigerons can be refreshed in late July with a haircut. Apart from that, sit back and watch – and enjoy the summer. □

• Jinny Blom is an award-winning garden designer based in London. Tel 020 7253 2100, [www.jinnyblom.com](http://www.jinnyblom.com)

**NEXT TIME** James Alexander-Sinclair designs a planting scheme for autumn-planted bulbs in our September issue.



## where to buy

### CROCUS

This online supplier has an increasingly good plant range, supported by smaller, specialist nurseries.

[www.crocus.co.uk](http://www.crocus.co.uk)  
CHILTERN SEEDS

Another online supplier; with everything the heart desires.  
[www.chilternseeds.co.uk](http://www.chilternseeds.co.uk)

### MARCHANTS HARDY PLANTS

The plants are tremendous, the catalogue is funny and owner Graham Gough is even funnier. (Details on p17.)

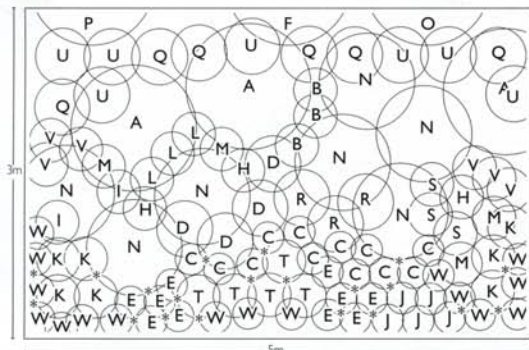
### VANTUBERGEN

I always buy bulbs wholesale, – too much is not enough.  
<http://en.vantubergen.nl/>



IMAGES: PHOTOLIBRARY; GAP PHOTOS; THE GARDEN COLLECTION

## planting plan & quantities



- PICTURED ABOVE**
- A *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' x3
  - B *Aconitum* 'Bressingham Spire' x3
  - C *Viola cornuta* 'Alba' x12
  - D *Leucanthemum vulgare* x3
  - E *Iris* 'Jane Phillips' x10
  - F *Clematis* x *tritemata* 'Rubromarginata' x1
  - G *Allium sphaerocephalum* x200\*
  - H *Verbascum blattaria*
  - I *Romneya coulteri* x2
  - J *Erigeron karvinskianus* x5
  - K *Astrantia* 'Roma' x7
  - L *Veronica* 'Pink Damask' x3
  - M *Cirsium rivulare* x4
  - N *Rosa* 'Madame Knorr' x7
  - O *Clematis* 'White Moth' x1
  - f. *albiflorum* x3
  - R *Campanula* 'Saraastro' x3
  - S *Geranium Patricia* (= 'Brempat') x3
  - T *Iris* 'Deep Black' x5
  - U *Leucanthemella serotina* x7
  - V *Lychnis coronaria* x6
  - W *Viola* 'Bowles's Black' x16
  - X *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus* x150\*
  - Y *Nerine bowdenii* x45\*
- NOT PICTURED**
- P *Clematis* 'Royal Velours' x1
  - Q *Campanula lactiflora* 'Loddon Anna' x6
- (\* denote positions of scattered bulbs.)