

OCTOBER 2016 £4.99

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## books



**MEADOWS: AT GREAT DIXTER AND BEYOND** (by Christopher Lloyd and Fergus Garrett; Pimpernel, rrp £30) The original version of *Meadows* created a justifiable stir when it came out in 2004. Christopher Lloyd, elder statesman of English gardening, always created books brimming with intelligence, charisma and controversy. This was one. Beautifully researched from his many trips to see natural meadows, it quickly became a vital handbook.

With typical prescience he opened by saying 'wild gardening in grass is set to become even more fashionable, now that fine-sward lawn – that featureless expanse of green which is the icon of the English garden – is, officially, under threat from climate change...' How right he was. 'When I was young,' he recalled, 'conservation was scarcely talked about.' Then his inclinations were simply 'to create a flowering tapestry of as many colours as possible, with green the overriding leitmotif'. Now, as Christopher foresaw, the designed meadow has become very fashionable indeed.

'Christo' was lifted from his gardening doldrums in the early 1990s by the arrival of his head gardener, Fergus Garrett. Together they lit the blue touchpaper of an English gardening renaissance. *Meadows* is not a memorial to Lloyd but the fruit of a progressive horticultural experiment. In a 20,000-word introduction to this new edition, Garrett documents the experiences, both successful and disastrous, of the evolving meadows and prairies at Dixter. It makes infectious reading. One of the great successes has been the liberation of the topiary lawns from their oppression of stripes to become carpets of naturalised orchids in wispy grass. The orchids take years to proliferate – and the waiting is all part of the game.

The book is packed with practical tips. 'For most soils,' Garrett advises, 'choose or make a mix of 80 per cent slow growing grasses to 20 per cent wild flowers.' But, he warns, 'avoid the temptation to increase the number of flowers to grasses' or, like many a callow meadower, you will simply generate a weed patch. Meadow gardening is volatile. After 10 grammes of *Succisa pratensis* (devil's-bit scabious) were planted in auspicious circumstances, 'it is now everywhere, in its thousands'. This is fine, Garrett believes, as it is 'the sole food of the marsh fritillary'.

This breezy mix of gardening, appreciation of natural process and symbioses with other species makes the book very engaging and enjoyable. And as Fergus said to me recently of his burgeoning group of interested parties at Dixter, 'We're doing even more work with nerds and specialists, and it is all very exciting!' And so it is. These evolving meadow diaries are set to become classics ■ JINNY BLOM is a landscape designer and the author of 'The Thoughtful Gardener' (Jacqui Small), to be published in March 2017 ▷

To order *Meadows* for £25.50 (plus £4.50 UK p&p), ring the World of Interiors Bookshop on 0871 911 1747

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