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The Magic of Chelsea

Casting its spell on gardeners worldwide, the hallowed

RHS Chelsea Flower Show returns this month.

Newmarket garden designer Melanie Taylor has tips on how to bring a little of the Chelsea magic to your own plot



Gather the intel

Whether you're looking to update your existing garden, starting from scratch with a new-build plot, or wanting to create a green haven on your balcony, Chelsea has inspiration in spades.

Watch the BBC coverage with a notepad to jot ideas down. Many designers and nurseries will have plant lists for the show on their websites so that you can search for a particular specimen.



If you have a ticket, go early in the morning to miss the crowds and be sure to take lots of photos. It's useful to photograph the stand signage before snapping the plants to identify the nursery and make filing your photos easier. You'll be amazed at just how many pictures you can take in a day, there's always something else to catch your eye around the next corner!

Follow the fashions

Much attention focused on the beautiful Benton irises in Sarah Price's wonderful Nurture Landscapes Garden last year which showcased the earthiest pastel hues. But whilst the gardening world rushed to get their hands on them, Sarah's design also featured many other useful plants such as *Euphorbia cyparissias*, *Geranium sanguineum* 'Cedric Morris', *Angelica archangelica* and *Eleagnus* 'Quick Silver'.

If you do go to Chelsea, be sure to visit the All About Plants Gardens and nursery stands in the Grand Pavilion. Large enough to house 500 London buses, the pavilion is packed full of plants from specialist nurseries, so you're bound to find something unusual as well as the coveted Plant and Product of the Year award nominees and winners. Don't forget to visit the trade stands too, as they put just as much effort into their award-winning displays and are full of ideas that can translate into our home gardens.



The Rhino Greenhouses Direct 'Time and Tide' display last year featured shade sails and corner gabion benches that would work well for the owner of a new-build garden who wants a coastal feel.

Gabions provide wildlife habitats too.

Woodpecker Joinery showcased their contemporary cedar water butt that does away with unsightly plastic and looks pretty surrounded by planting.

Furnish your outdoor room

Just as many visitors wear their best attire, the gardens are dressed in their finery too. Furniture and décor play a key role in the look and feel of a garden and Chelsea is *the* place to see what's on trend. It doesn't have to be expensive to replicate these ideas. Many high street and online retailers offer 'lookalike' pieces, and you can easily make a succulent planted candle centrepiece at home. In the same way that we use mirrors indoors to make rooms look bigger, a common designer 'trick' is to incorporate mirrors in our gardens. A strategically placed mirror can make a garden look longer and reflect an image that we want to highlight – such as setting off certain planting. The Chelsea Gardener used this technique to great effect in their Shifting Garden Container Garden last year. Outdoor kitchens featured heavily in 2023 and if you don't have the space for an entire kitchen, you can incorporate individual outdoor entertaining pieces such as this fold-up Garden Pizza Oven Table from Zest Outdoor Living.





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Use colour to make planting pop

The trend for painting fences dark colours has been around for a while now, but Rosemary Coldstream's *Feels Like Home Container Garden* in 2023 really showed just how magnificently lime green foliage colour can pop against a dark background. Her ferns looked amazing against the charred wood. The vibrancy of the pinks, purples and oranges used in Manoj Malde's *RHS and Eastern Eye Garden of Unity* (main image on left) were fantastic foils to the combination of textures and tones in his planting, creating an explosion of colour.



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Save space with edimental pots

Contemporary raised planters can be used to define the edge of a garden border or to create space for planting where space is limited, as Christina Cobb of *Garden Club London* demonstrated in *The Restorative Balcony Garden* sponsored by Viking last year. Many vegetable plants have beautiful foliage, so instead of hiding them in a veg patch at the bottom of the garden, why not plant them amongst your planters or flower beds to bring a different aesthetic to your space and make it both ornamental and productive?

Look forward to Chelsea 2024

The themes of sustainability, biodiversity, wellbeing and urban gardening will take centre stage at this year's event. Tom Massey and Je Ahn showcase sustainable water management and drought-tolerant planting in the *WaterAid Garden*, whilst Ann-Marie Powell's *Octavia Hill Garden* with *Blue Diamond* and the National Trust celebrates National Trust founder Octavia Hill and demonstrates that nature is for everyone with a series of outdoor sitting rooms on

an urban brownfield site. Tom Stuart-Smith hopes his *National Garden Scheme Garden* will "exemplify the joy and associated health and wellbeing benefits of garden visiting that have been at the heart of the National Garden Scheme since 1927. The garden's drift of gentle underplanting of drought-tolerant woodland plants, laid out through an open hazel coppice, is designed to give a sense of calm and a connection to nature". The garden will eventually be relocated to the new *Maggie's Cancer Centre* at *Addenbrooke's*.



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Japanese designer Kazuyuki Ishihara returns to the *Sanctuary Gardens* category this year with *The MOROTO no IE Garden*, the theme of which is happiness. As in previous years, his garden will feature acers and mosses. Even the smallest domestic garden can accommodate an acer (Japanese maple) either as a shrub or a small tree. Slow-growing and compact, they provide the most stunning autumn colour. The Chelsea gardens take months of planning, hard work, and enormous sums to produce the structures and planting you see there, but it is possible to adapt ideas to suit your budget and style of garden. Most importantly, think about how you want to use your garden and what atmosphere you are trying to create. You don't have to be a dedicated follower of fashion, instead plant what brings you joy, and like Kazuyuki Ishihara, create a garden that makes you happy.



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Remember the 'Chelsea Chop'!

Cut back late-flowering herbaceous perennials by a third to a half at the end of May to get superior blooms later into the summer. Reducing the top growth encourages side shoots to make the plant bush out. If you have several clumps of a plant, you can stagger and prolong the overall flowering period by only cutting back some, and leaving others, or by cutting the stems at the front of a clump and leaving those at the back.

Garden favourites suitable for the Chelsea Chop include *Achillea* (Yarrow), *Echinacea* (Coneflower), *Helenium* (Sneezeweed) and *Phlox paniculata* (Perennial phlox).

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If you're inspired by Chelsea and would like help translating your ideas into a design that works for your garden, reach out to Melanie by email: melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk or via the contact form on her website: hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk



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MAIN IMAGE: Manoj Malde's garden, photo by RHS/Tim Sandall **PHOTOS:** 1 Image of Chelsea Pensioners, photo by RHS/Oliver Dixon; 2 Rhino Greenhouses Direct - image of shade sails and gabions, photo by Melanie Taylor; 3 Water butt, supplied by Woodpecker Joinery; 4 Garden Pizza Oven Table from Zest Outdoor Living; 5 Rosemary Coldstream's *Feels Like Home Garden*, photo by Melanie Taylor; 6 Manoj Malde's *Garden Seats*, photo by RHS/Tim Sandall; 7 CGI of *MOROTO no IE Garden*, by Kazuyuki Ishihara; 8 *Candleholder*, photo by Melanie Taylor; 9 *The Shifting Garden* by *The Chelsea Gardener*, photo by Melanie Taylor; 10 *The Restorative Balcony Garden* sponsored by Viking, photo by Joanna Kossak; 11 *The National Garden Scheme Garden*, by Tom Stuart-Smith