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Regional Magazine
of the Year 2024

velvet*

The HEAT SEEKING Issue

HOMES ■ FOOD ■ CULTURE ■ PEOPLE ■ WELLBEING ■ STYLE

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Velvet Loves... Open Studios at 50



It's been making art accessible to all for five decades: hands together for Cambridge Open Studios, the free summer event series which celebrated its 50th anniversary last month. More than 150 guests were invited to a party at the city's Graduate Hotel, complete with Champagne, canapes, speeches and an art and craft showcase spanning all disciplines, from painting and pottery to jewellery making. Open Studios sees hundreds of local artists open their workspaces to the public across all four weekends of July every year. See camopenstudios.org




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This month's cover comes from our high-summer fashion shoot at Newmarket's The Spa at Bedford Lodge Hotel – see page 46



You can now find Velvet in even more places

GARDENING FOR GOOD

With weather getting ever warmer and wetter, climate change is fast being felt in our gardens. So how can we make our plots more resilient and help curb climate change in the process? Newmarket garden designer Melanie Taylor shares her expert advice

According to recent Met Office figures, the UK experienced its warmest May on record since 1884, and we had 116% of our average May rainfall. Milder, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers are changing the way we garden. We're benefiting from longer growing seasons, but facing other challenges – drought, flooding, fierce winds and an increase in pests and diseases overwintering and surviving in warmer temperatures. As former US President Barack Obama said: "We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it." So how can we mitigate its impact in our gardens?

Start with your soil

It's important to understand your soil – sandy, chalky or clay etc. Digging in organic matter improves its water-holding capacity in the summer, but it also serves us well during wet spells. Excess water suffocates plants in waterlogged soil because of a lack of oxygen. Digging in garden compost or manure binds the tiny sticky particles in clay soil into a crumb-like texture to help improve drainage to prevent waterlogging. It also makes more water available to the roots of plants as they grow through the air pockets in the soil. Sandy soils might drain well, but they dry out quickly and are low in nutrients which get washed away by rain. Incorporating organic matter into sandy soils aids moisture retention as does adding mulch to your beds in the form of compost, bark, or gravel.

Resilient design

Design in resilient features such as rain gardens, swales, rain chains or gravel gardens to cope with the challenging weather conditions. Beth Chatto's adage of 'right plant, right place' is even more important today. Using native plants increases resilience as they have adapted to the surrounding environment. Notice what is thriving in countryside verges and then buy wildflower plugs or their ornamental counterparts to add to your garden such as *Leucanthemum vulgare* (Oxeye daisies).

Thoughtful planting

As temperatures rise, the traditional



Beth Chatto's gravel garden
PICTURE: Melanie Taylor of Hazelwood Plantscapes



Pollinator-friendly planting in Melanie's Countryside Border at the Belvoir Castle Show 2023 PICTURE: Melanie Taylor

'English cottage garden' will be harder to cultivate. Roses, lupins and delphiniums will all need greater care. Consider how plants have adapted to survive different conditions and select those which grow well abroad. Mediterranean plants will thrive as our summers here warm up. Sempervivums use their fleshy leaves to store water, and plants with silvery, glaucous blue leaves like *Santolina chamaecyparissus* reflect the sun. *Santolina* even copes well in clay if it is well drained.

Gravel gardening

Mediterranean planting works particularly well in gravel gardens which are best built on sandy soil. If your garden is based on clay, you'll need good drainage so it will be more work and expense as you'll need a deeper layer of gravel. Gravel gardens aren't necessarily as low maintenance as they appear, for they do need some effort to establish and will need 'editing' of weeds as they mature. But they are very pollinator friendly and generally use far less water. For tips on how to create gravel gardens check out the Beth Chatto gardens website or better still, take a trip to Colchester, it's a fabulous day out.

Good all-rounders

Some plants we might have thought were either drought-tolerant or moisture loving, actually cope well in both conditions. *Physostegia virginiana* – the 'Obedient Plant' – is native to the American prairies. It's good for a wildflower planting scheme here, and lives up to its name, being both tolerant of drought and poor drainage. It was the most popular plant in my show garden at Belvoir Castle last summer. A stunning plant, with snapdragon-like

flowers, it caused quite a stir with visitors. Other plants that do well in both wet and dry conditions include *Verbena bonariensis* (Purple Top), *Lythrum salicaria* (Purple Loosestrife) and *Bistorta amplexicaulis* (formerly known as Persicaria).

If you're wanting drought-tolerant plants, then designer favourites, *Geranium Rozanne*, *Hylotelephium* 'Herbstfreude' (Sedum Autumn Joy), *Salvia* 'Blue Spire' and the giant thistles of *Eryngium giganteum* 'Miss Wilmott's Ghost' are all good options for a modern cottage garden.

Permeable paths and living surfaces Where possible, avoid having large areas of hard landscaping that make it difficult for water to permeate. When laying a patio, (provided it's not on concrete) you can leave out some pavers to create 'planting pockets' which will soften and prettify your patio and are lower maintenance than pots and containers. Fill a hole at least 30 cm deep with soil and organic matter to aid water retention before planting up.

You can 'retrofit' an existing patio with planting pockets by carefully lifting slabs, forking over the compacted soil underneath, removing any stones or cement, and adding some topsoil. 'Living paths' can be created with 'creeping' plants such as *Thymus*

'Bressingham Pink' or Chamomile between flagstones or in gravel paths. To increase biodiversity, reduce areas of lawn or consider a 'tapestry lawn' with clover, daisies, and other wildflowers to attract pollinators. Growing climbers against house walls and installing green roofs can help mitigate climate change by cooling temperatures. The 'greening' of walls and permeable paving was beautifully demonstrated in the MOROTO no IE garden by Kazuyuki Ishihara at RHS Chelsea this year.

Be water-wise

Conserving our water use is increasingly important. Even the smallest garden can take a slimline water butt and irrigation drip systems are very effective at targeting water directly at the roots of plants to ensure nothing is wasted. Try to water your garden in the morning so that it doesn't evaporate as the temperature rises. Watering in the evening creates a damp haven overnight for slugs and sometimes causes powdery mildew on leaves. It's better to give your plants a good soaking once or twice a week to ensure it reaches the roots, rather than a light sprinkle every day. Reuse 'grey' water on the garden but be mindful of detergents etc.

Functional water features

An ancient tradition was revived at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year, with the use of ollas in 'The Freedom from Torture Garden – A Sanctuary for Survivors' by John Warland and Emma O'Connell. These porous clay pots are sunk into the ground and filled with water which slowly seeps into the earth around them. Ollas are



The MOROTO no IE Sanctuary Garden designed by Kazuyuki Ishihara PICTURE: Sarah Cuttle



The Flood Re Flood Resilient Chelsea Garden 2024 designed by Naomi Slade and Dr Ed Barsley PICTURE RHS Sarah Cuttle

readily available to buy in garden centres and online.

Another popular RHS Chelsea garden was 'The Flood Re – Flood Resilient Garden' by Naomi Slade and Dr Ed Barsley, designed to showcase how a garden can adapt to the challenges of heavy rainfall and surface water flooding. It featured a swale that channelled rainwater into a feature pond and innovative tanks doubling as ornamental pools, using smart technology to discharge the reserved water ahead of more rainfall. Dense planting throughout the garden also slowed the flow of rainwater.

Support wildlife

The impact of the shifting seasons on our garden ecosystems and wildlife is causing confusion as birds begin to nest earlier, and the skewed flowering seasons impact pollinators. We need a greater variety of plants that flower for longer to cater for all our garden visitors. Certain plants provide fodder for different larvae and caterpillars

which emerge at different times.

Build wildlife habitats such as dead hedges or bug hotels from fallen twigs and prunings, bricks and recycled materials to encourage invertebrates. Create hedgehog highways between neighbouring gardens and add a water feature or wildlife pond to attract frogs and toads which will save your hostas by keeping the snail and slug population down.

Plant trees

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second-best time is now." Debate surrounds the origin of the alleged proverb, but we can still act today. One of the best things we can do today to offset the impacts of climate change tomorrow is plant trees. They sequester carbon by taking carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locking it away in their trunks.

They prevent soil erosion by acting as windbreaks and bind the soil together with their roots. Trees also alleviate flood risk by slowing down rainwater runoff and several species play an important role in urban landscapes with their ability to absorb pollution and provide cooling shade as our towns and cities warm up.

Trees suitable for domestic gardens include the *Arbutus unedo* (Strawberry Tree) native to the Mediterranean and known for its strawberry-like fruits. Or the *Acer griseum* (Paperbark Maple) which has wonderful peeling bark that birds love for lining their nests. The Callery pear tree, *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer' is low-maintenance, drought tolerant, and absorbs particulates so reduces air pollution.

There are 30 million gardeners in the UK, so if we all do our own little bit to create sustainable habitats in our gardens and increase biodiversity, we really can make a big difference. It's vital we all step up to the climate challenge, for, as French President Emmanuel Macron clearly said: "There is no Planet B."

If you'd like help designing resilient features or planting schemes for your garden, or refurbishing an existing border, reach out to Melanie at melanie.taylor@hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk or use the contact form on her website: hazelwoodplantscapes.co.uk