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Why Melanie Taylor has more than 50 roses in her garden

by [Thompson & Morgan](#) | Nov 8, 2024



Image courtesy of Melanie Taylor

Melanie Taylor of [Hazelwood Plantscapes](#) has just been shortlisted for a Garden Media Guild Award sponsored by T&M – *The Alan Titchmarsh New Talent of the Year Award 2024*.

Following a change in career from the tech sector, Melanie has spent the last two years retraining in horticulture and garden design. Here's what she had to say about her love of gardening and the inspiration behind her career change...

Tell us how you got into gardening?

I'm a career changer. Swapping microchips for micro-organisms, as a passionate amateur gardener, I relished the opportunity to take voluntary redundancy from the tech sector, enabling me to retrain in horticulture and garden design. I've spent the last two years studying for a Diploma in garden design, taking courses in garden history, and gaining my RHS Level 2 qualifications in the Principles of Plant Growth and Development and Practical Horticulture.

Like many others, I discovered the joy of gardening from my late grandmother Hazel, who had a lovely suburban garden in Cuffley, Hertfordshire. She was such an inspiration to me that I named my design practice after her.

Hers was a sloped garden that was terraced and edged with conifers with cobbled paths leading to secret hiding places behind the summerhouse. The top terrace was a rose garden, and she had a magnificent display of hydrangeas in the front garden. I would spend many happy hours in Nan's greenhouse taking cuttings from her roses, which fuelled my lifelong passion for them – at last count I have over 50 in my own garden!

What's been your greatest gardening achievement?



Melanie's show garden at the Belvoir Castle Flower and Garden Show 2023

Image: Melanie Taylor

My greatest achievement was being selected as a finalist to build a show garden at the Belvoir Castle Flower and Garden Show 2023. I enjoyed creating a wildlife friendly countryside border based on the flora and fauna of the Vale of Belvoir. And of course now being shortlisted by GMG for *The Alan Titchmarsh New Talent of the Year* award for my writing.

How has using social media impacted your gardening journey?

Social media was invaluable when I was studying. I follow my favourite designers on Instagram and the RHS Study Groups on Facebook were a great resource for horticultural advice and tips for the RHS exams.

What's your single, most important piece of gardening advice?

Simply know your soil, and plant what brings you joy.

How has a garden or landscape influenced you?

I enjoy visiting all sorts of gardens for inspiration for both design and my writing. I love understanding the garden in the context of its place, uncovering its history and telling the stories of the personalities behind a garden, both owners and those who tend the garden, many of whom are unseen, bringing their stories to life.

I've recently been inspired by visits to Hidcote and Kiftsgate, and their grand sweeping vistas. But I'm equally struck by the beauty of some local venues such as the Italianate garden at the Gardens of Easton Lodge, Lucy Boston's beautiful setting for her *Green Knowe* books at Hemingford Manor and the little-known delights of Docwra's Manor. Of course, Beth Chatto's gardens continue to be a source of planting ideas, particularly given our changing climate and I often return to Geoff Hamilton's gardens at Barnsdale in Rutland as they are so full of ideas and planting that are accessible to amateur gardeners at home.

If you were stuck on a desert island and could only take three plants – one practical, one beautiful, and one unusual, what would they be?



These magnificent flowers resemble the bright plumage of birds

Image: [Strelitzia 'Bird of Paradise'](#) from T&M

Assuming there would already be coconut trees on my desert island, then I'd bring a practical plant like sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) not least for the vitamins and energy they'd give me, but I'd also be able to celebrate Thanksgiving with my favourite candied yams.

My beautiful choice would be a *Strelitzia reginae* (Bird of Paradise) and my unusual but most special plant would be the entwined cherry tree *Prunus lusitanica angustifolia* that my husband bought me for our anniversary.

What's next?

On the design front, one of my London clients is moving to Suffolk and has presented me with a complete blank canvas to bring a contemporary design to his Victorian garden, so that will be fun. I'll be continuing to research and write my features for *Velvet Magazine* and I'm also looking forward to getting stuck into a local community garden project in the new year.

More about the Garden Media Guild Awards

Each year, the Garden Media Guild celebrates our most talented gardening professionals with a selection of coveted awards. Their shortlist features authors, journalists, photographers, vloggers, podcasters and gardening influencers. The entrants are judged by their peers and experts in the field.

This year, Thompson & Morgan is delighted to sponsor '*The Alan Titchmarsh New Talent of the Year Award 2024*'. This special award is for "*the person that has made outstanding first steps in the world of garden media, demonstrating talent and potential in his or her field.*" Find the full list of [GMG awards](#) here.