

A garden of inspiring variety

Removing a lawn proved the key decision in transforming Annie Godfrey's Hertford garden, which today features lavish perennial planting that spills over a central gravel path, set within a geometric layout

Author: Naomi Slade, freelance horticultural writer. Photography: Suzie Gibbons

Borrowed and embellished
Potted sentinels of *Ilex crenata* 'Fastigiata' provide structure along a meandering gravel path, overspilled by perennials such as grasses *Stipa gigantea* and *Deschampsia cespitosa*, as well as *Sedum* and *Geranium* 'Mavis Simpson'. Potted pelargoniums and other tender subjects inject interest, while the spire of the church makes a fine borrowed focal point.

When career horticulturist Annie Godfrey moved to Gosselin Road in Hertford 17 years ago, the garden was the first thing to feel the change. 'The layout was fairly simple at the time,' she says. 'I kept nibbling away at the lawn and took a sledgehammer to the concrete path.'

The garden evolved and Annie opened for the National Gardens Scheme (NGS) in 2001. But she was not completely happy with the

garden and, in 2009, she came up with a new layout. 'All of a sudden I had a game plan. I got rid of the lawn, and completely redesigned and replanted it.' All the existing plants were dug up and taken to use as stock to Daisy Roots, the nursery Annie set up in 1999, and the garden was replanted afresh.

Novel approach

Annie's new design came with a structured feel. She banished curves in favour of straight lines and right angles. Though softened to a meander

by sprawling summer perennials, the wide gravel path proceeds with staccato corners, every turn marked by a strongly vertical *Ilex crenata* 'Fastigiata' (Japanese holly). These march up the garden, mirroring the church spire on the horizon, while the rectangular slabs of clipped *Buxus* (box) anchor each opposing corner. The visitor is directed gently, but firmly, into a garden wonderland of intense colour.

With such sharp twists and turns, it is just not possible to amble inconsequentially up the garden. Each change of direction brings a punctuating pause for thought. As aspect and view change, pleasingly arranged pots, planting combinations and ornamental rusted iron shapes are brought successively into focus.

The destination, at the end of the garden, is fragrant with lavender, sweet peas and *Nicotiana mutabilis*, with its clouds of pink and white flowers. 'I wanted a sunken area, a suntrap of scented, silvery, pastel plants, with a feeling of being somewhere else,' Annie says.

Dug by hand, the area is not particularly sunken, but the vertiginous planting that surrounds

Delightful but tender *Nicotiana mutabilis* with pink and white bells mingles with orange *Echinacea* 'Tiki Torch', silvery-blue *Eryngium bourgatii*, pink *Oenothera speciosa* 'Rosea' and blackcurrant-hued *Sedum telephium* Atropurpureum Group 'Purple Emperor'.



Using terracotta pots unifies vibrant displays of tender plants.



Surrounding a potted *Ilex crenata* 'Fastigiata' are choice perennials: in the foreground the dainty white tassels of *Sanguisorba tenuifolia* var. *alba* contrast with the purple heads of *Eupatorium fistulosum* and golden daisies of *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm', while beyond is billowing *Stipa capillata*, and the huge cream flowerheads of *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle'.

the sleeper edging makes it seem lower than it is. Between this area and the house Annie has planted steely-blue *Echinops*, *Aster novae-angliae* 'Harrington's Pink', *Melianthus major* and *Anthemis tinctoria* 'Wargrave Variety' – effectively screening the house from view.

Gardening ethos

The garden's soil is free draining yet retentive, enabling Annie to leave out to overwinter borderline-hardy plants such as salvias and dahlias. She mulches with mushroom compost and waters to get plants to the desired size, but does not feed. 'I don't like to feed herbaceous plants,' she says. 'They grow too lush and then flop; they are also susceptible to aphids.'

Despite this, many of her plants are decidedly beefy. *Stipa gigantea* and *Ilex crenata* reach for the sky. A stooled *Paulownia tomentosa* throws out vast leaves while *Ferula communis* (giant fennel) has spikes of lime-green

flowers reaching 3.6m (12ft).

Most of the plants are sold by Daisy Roots. 'I try to grow as many different plants as I can to see how they behave; whether they are worth propagating and how they will work in clients' gardens,' she says.

Planting is anchored by geometry and botanical rigour; no two plants are the same. Diaphanous grasses such as *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *arundinacea* 'Transparent' contrast with, and are anchored by, solid plants such as *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' or richly hued *Sedum telephium* Atropurpureum Group 'Purple Emperor'. Sombre colours are energised by blues and yellows.

Although her nursery is time consuming, Annie does not find her garden a chore. 'I don't consider the garden to be labour intensive, more of an occasional potter. A garden is as hard work as you want it to be' – a sentiment that makes this near-perfect perennial confection an ideal to which we all can aspire. ◉

Gosselin Road

Location: 8 Gosselin Rd, Bengeo, Hertford SG14 3LG; www.daisyroots.com

Size: 30m long x 9m wide (100 x 30ft).

Soil type: free-draining loam.

Age: redesigned in 2009.

Key season of interest: peaks in summer but is being extended through winter and spring.

Aspect: south facing.

Open: 25 July, 29 Aug (2-5pm) and 30 Sept (12-5pm) for NGS.



Annie Godfrey and Myrtle.