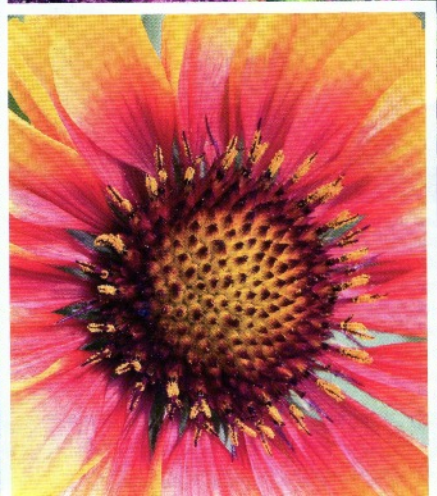


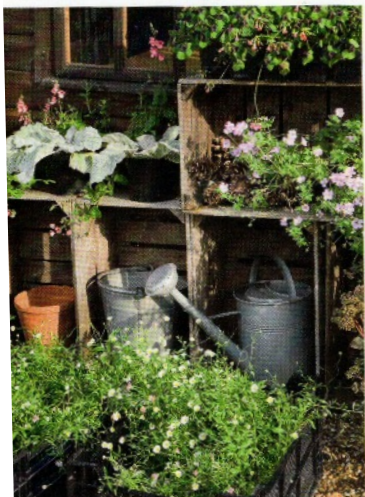
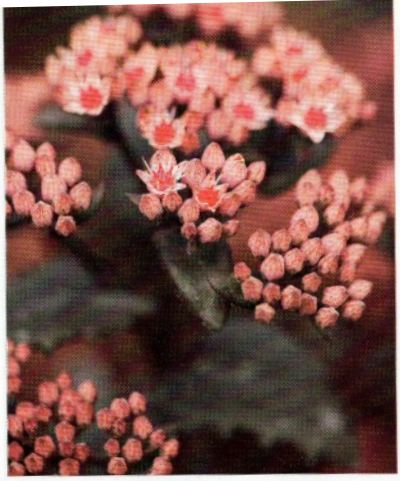
The CONSTANT GARDENER

*A passion for perennials and
a talent for propagation planted the
seeds of an idea for a Hertfordshire horticulturalist's flourishing business*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZIE GIBBONS WORDS BY STEPHANIE DONALDSON



MAIN PICTURE The sales area of the nursery is packed with pots of beautiful perennials. INSET, FROM LEFT Anne attends to her seedlings; the fiery flower of *Gaillardia aristata*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Sedum 'Xenox'*; colourful displays of late perennials seen through a haze of yellow *Lysimachia punctata*; *Trifolium repens*; Anne restocking the sales area; crates of erigeron and assorted plants, pots and watering cans outside the office

it has just continued that way," Anne says. "Besides, if things were ordered alphabetically I'd be endlessly shuffling them along to fit something into the right place. It looks lovely this way but can cause confusion when I'm not around and my colleagues are looking for a particular plant." Unlike some independent nurseries, Daisy Roots is immaculate. "That's the first thing people notice, especially other nurserymen," she adds. "It's because I can never walk past a weed."

Anne's choice of plants is eclectic: "I don't grow anything I wouldn't give space to in my own garden. They have to appeal to me rather than being fashionable and I do like common plants – old faithfuls like *Sedum 'Autumn Joy'* – they're popular for a reason." Within the nursery there's a strong sense of form, with grasses and late-flowering perennials that work so well for European-style drift planting. There are fiery gaillardia, achillea in a range of pleasing shades, dainty *Gaura lindheimeri*, several varieties of lysimachia, and tall *Verbena bonariensis*, its swaying stems topped with clusters of tiny mauve flowers. A current

favourite benefiting from her propagation skills is sanguisorba and Anne has raised one of her own, 'Baby Elephant', which is a chance seedling from 'Pink Elephant' but with softer colouring.

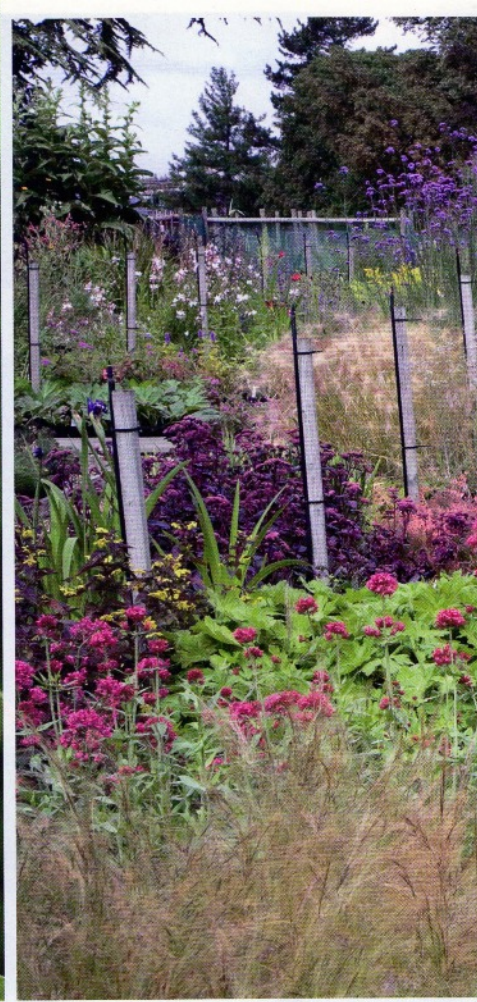
These days Anne spends most weekday mornings looking after clients' gardens – "not basics like cutting the grass but designing, planting and keeping herbaceous borders up to scratch" – together with her partner, Steve Machin, who also has a background in garden maintenance and joined the business in 2003. She can usually be found in the nursery in the afternoon and at weekends while Steve does the farmers' markets and plant fairs, and they join forces for the big events – hard work but deeply satisfying. Looking at the glorious borders at Daisy Roots, you can't help but feel that her talents would have been wasted on house plants. *Daisy Roots is open 10am-4pm on Fridays and Saturdays only, March-October inclusive, with talks and workshops some Saturday mornings (booking advisable). Plants are available by mail order, mid-October till the end of March, when they're not in full growth, and therefore easier to post (07958 563355; www.daisyroots.com).*

Trifolium repens; Anne restocking the sales area; crates of erigeron and assorted plants, pots and watering cans outside the office



Plants for the September border

- For the front of a bed, try *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*, *Heuchera 'Peach Flambe'* and *Sanguisorba stipulata 'Tanna'*. Autumn tints in the ceratostigma echo the foliage colour of the heuchera and dark maroon of the sanguisorba flowers.
- The pale biscuit-coloured grass *Molinia caerulea 'Transparent'* looks great backed by the dark purple-black stems and foliage of *Aster laevis 'Calliope'*, topped by lavender-blue flowers. The coral-red wand-like blooms of *Persicaria amplexicaulis 'Firetail'* complete the picture.
- *Helenium 'Indianersommer'* is particularly tall and has red flowers flushed burnt copper. Pair it with *Miscanthus sinensis 'Flamingo'*, notable for its drooping flower heads, and *Helianthus salicifolius*, grown for its long, architectural stems clothed in languid leaves.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Lysimachia clethroides*; avenues of perennials lead to the polytunnel where Anne propagates all her plants;

striking *Cirsium diacantha*; *Achillea* 'Terracotta'; the entrance to the nursery offers an enticing view of the plants beyond its gates



Anne Godfrey's horticultural career did not have the most auspicious of beginnings. She left school keen on pursuing her interest in indoor plants and had an apprenticeship lined up at leading house-plant specialist Rochfords, but unfortunately joined the company just as it made the decision to give up in the face of stiff competition from Holland. A job in a local nursery followed and then a few years of doing a sandwich round. "The good thing about it was that it finished early in the day," Anne says, explaining the apparent change of direction, "which meant that I could help a friend out who did garden maintenance but had more work than he could handle. It didn't take long to realise that I preferred gardening to sandwiches."

Determined to have a proper horticultural qualification, she enrolled at Capel Manor and did a year-long garden design course. This was followed by one on hard-landscaping which was never completed because she was already far too busy designing and maintaining gardens for clients. At this point

a nursery wasn't even on the agenda, but fate intervened in the unlikely form of two county organisers for The National Gardens Scheme. Anne had decided to open her own garden in aid of the NGS both to support the charity and spread the word about her budding design business. "Two jolly ladies from the NGS arrived to inspect my garden," Anne explains. "It was overflowing with plants and had a crammed greenhouse and I casually happened to mention that I could do with more space. That evening one of the women, Gail Fox, rang and asked if I would be interested in doing some garden maintenance for her on a regular basis and also offered a small area that I might be able to use for propagation. That's how Daisy Roots started - on a narrow piece of land that had previously been Gail's chicken run."

With a 30-foot polytunnel, electricity and water, Anne was soon spending every spare moment there. "I got the propagation bug," she says, "and realised that I had a talent for it. I started by selling my plants at other local NGS openings in the area and demand grew to the point where I really needed more

room. When she realised that she might lose my services if I moved elsewhere, Gail offered me this corner of a 12-acre field."

Daisy Roots is not a nursery that attracts passing trade; it is discreetly tucked away down a lane near Hertford and there are no signs advertising its presence. Instead, it sells most of its stock at farmers' markets, NGS openings, plant fairs and, more recently, displays at the RHS London shows in spring and autumn, Hampton Court Palace Flower Show (where the stand has won four silver-gilt medals) and Gardeners' World Live. Those who do find their way to the nursery have generally bought Daisy Roots plants elsewhere or heard of it through word of mouth.

Visitors who seek it out will be greeted by Myrtle, Anne's rough-coated Jack Russell. Tail wagging, she'll lead you to the nursery entrance where there's a changing seasonal display around the hut, which acts as office and sales point. In reality, the entire nursery serves as a seasonal display because the plants aren't arranged in the conventional alphabetical order. "I started off grouping those that looked good together and >