



WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

In an extract from her new book, designer Marian Boswall argues that planet-friendly garden design can be natural and nurturing – so be inspired and let the magic happen

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From the moment we wake up each morning, we are making decisions that affect our wellbeing and our environment. Many of them may not seem to make much impact, but collectively they have the capacity to do great good.

As a landscape architect of 20 years, I make design decisions every day, and early on in my career I sometimes wished I'd had better information to help make those choices and to explain them to my clients. Over time, I have developed an approach that is part practical and part spiritual. I listen to the land and the people who live there, and each time aim to create somewhere that is both beautiful and nurturing, for the people and for all the other beings that share the space, from deep down below ground and right up to the sky.

We are each a small part of a big beautiful world and joined together we have a huge part to play. I find that gardening is one of the most intimate ways to experience the infinite power of nature and my place within it. When I'm in the process of designing a

garden I put into practice inspirations, memories and knowledge that we all share at some level and can use to understand and create our gardens.

Creating space

Creating a space can be the most magical part of designing a garden. When you look at a blank canvas, the potential is limitless. What you do with it comes back to how you want to live, how much you want to look after it and how much time and money you have to invest. To create a sustainable garden, you need to plan for the long term and at the same time consider how much you want to spend today.

If you are renting or intending to move on in a few years' time, it is still worth investing in plants, but you may be able to make do and make over the existing paving or gravel areas. Old mortar can be removed and plants such as thyme sown in the cracks to give uninspiring paving slabs a lift, while adding to your garden's biodiversity and attracting pollinators. By creating gaps between the slabs, you also allow water to permeate and reduce runoff, which ▷

Above right Choose plants that will thrive in your garden to minimise added care. If you can select plants that would choose to grow in your garden naturally, you will be going with the energetic flow, rather than battling against nature.

Above left If possible, you should start your planting with elements of structure: trees, if you can fit them, then hedges, shrubs and climbers. After that, consider herbaceous perennials and, finally, quick-growing annuals, which will flower and set seed within the year.

Facing page Sustainable gardening includes taking time for yourself to connect and relax, something Marian Boswall works and lives by in her practice as a landscape architect.



Above When planning your garden, it pays to spend some time getting to know it well before you start to lay it out. By working with your site and its natural resources, you can save money, time and heartache, and quickly create a more self-supporting mini microclimate.

Facing page The reuse of old paving stones such as for a stepping stone pathway through an area of planting, is a good way to keep resources on site.

▷ helps to protect the soil elsewhere in the garden and also helps to prevent flooding occurring in built-up areas. Gravel is a relatively cheap way to keep feet dry and create areas that can be shared by people and plants.

The way a garden looks and feels is a direct result of your intention for the space, so it is worth deciding at the start if this is to be primarily a garden for entertaining, meditating or being alone, growing food or allowing children space to play. Of course, with a bit of careful planning the space can be all of these things in turn, to each of its users.

Planning the site

Think about who else uses your garden: are there certain creatures you want to create a home for or to encourage, or are there marauders you want to dissuade? Does your boundary link with others to provide a wildlife corridor for bats, owls, and harvest mice, or if not, could it? Add to your assessment the ways in which you want to spend your time in the garden, in terms of fun and productivity. And finally, make a list of the waste bins, bicycles, compost bins,

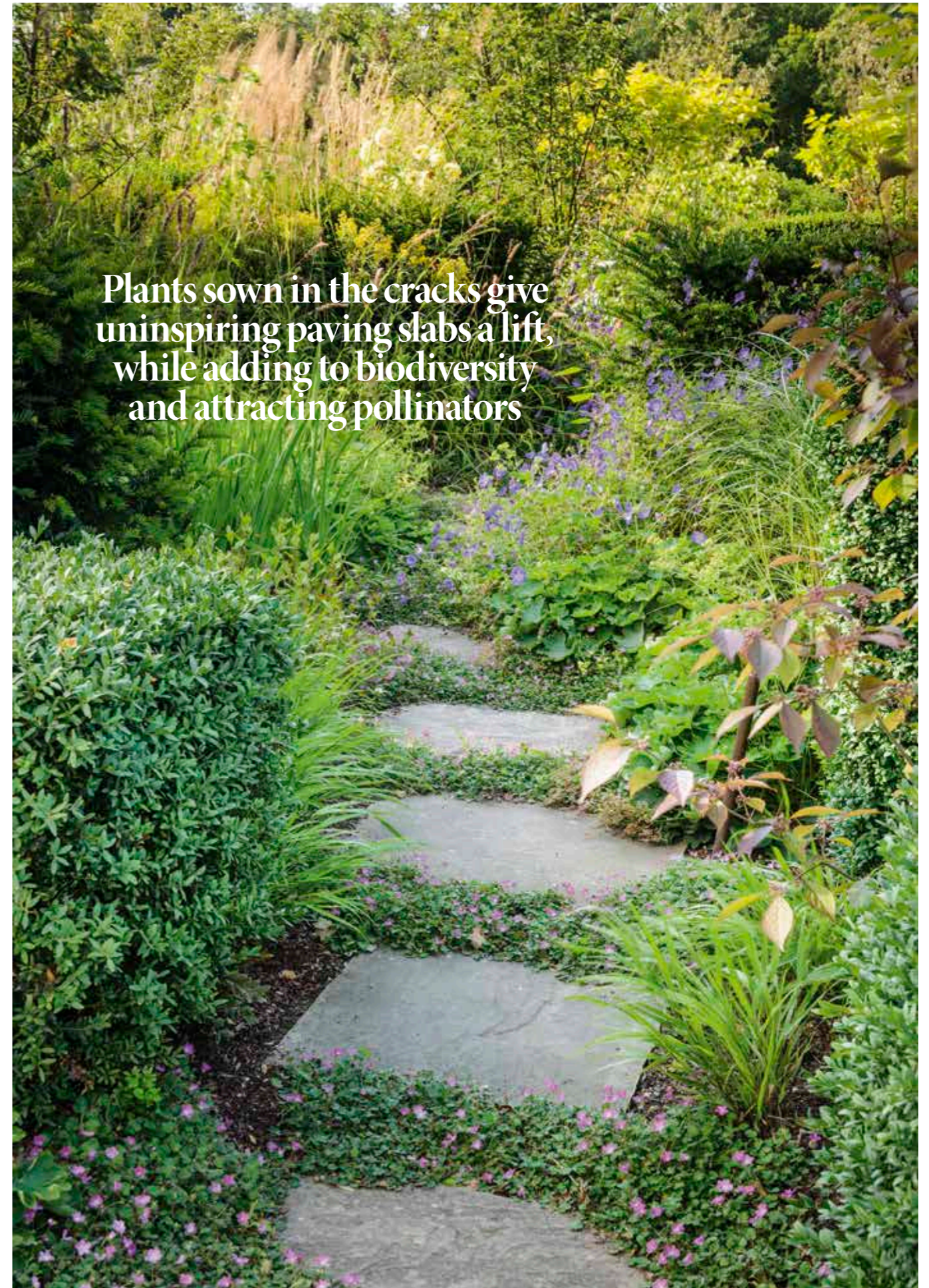
glasshouse, air source heat pump, water butts, log store, extra children's play areas, and other features that will all need a home outside too.

Once you are armed with the site specifics and know what you want to do in it, you can start to lay out what will go where, and decide how you will move through the spaces and what you will grow: vegetables, flowers, trees, hedges, herbs, climbers, nettles and comfrey. You may want to include partitions or be happy with areas and needs that overlap; nature is very good at sharing space, just don't forget to build in areas for wildlife.

Shrubs and climbers

After trees, shrubs and climbers form the backbone of the sustainable garden. When chosen carefully they will provide structure, texture, colour and scent all year round, as well as places to live, nest and forage for lots of different wildlife, both above and below the soil.

When we invite a person to a party, we don't just think about what they look like, and the same is true of plants. By considering their properties and ▷



Plants sown in the cracks give uninspiring paving slabs a lift, while adding to biodiversity and attracting pollinators



Above left A dead hedge provides excellent wildlife corridors between territories for small mammals – you will also find birds of prey perching on them to hunt. As dead hedges decompose, the wood becomes the perfect host for invertebrates and fungi. These hedges also make great barriers and free alternatives to a fence, using cuttings from tree pruning and any woody material that can be laid in rows.

Above right As well as providing habitat, shade and carbon capture, trees are a great addition to a sustainable garden because they provide lots of different types of food for us and for wildlife.



▷ functions, as well as their appearance, we can create a mini ecosystem that can thrive and be almost self-sustaining, needing minimal additions from us throughout the gardening year.

By planting in layers, you can protect the soil, lock up carbon and prevent water runoff, as well as creating a beautiful mini ecosystem. Shrubs also create the structural layer in the garden, working together with smaller plants to provide a year-round covering that protects and can also feed the soil.

So how do we choose shrubs and climbers? When planning what to plant, we want to make the least change for the greatest effect, so begin by seeing what is growing in your garden already and how you can work with that. If you have a fence covered in ivy or a wall with moss, think twice before stripping it all off, since moss is one of the best air purifiers, and mature ivy flowers are a favourite forage for bees, while the plant offers a great place for birds to nest. So, keep a bit of the beneficial stuff, but clip it back (though not during nesting season) if you are tidy minded, and then you can add to what's already there.

Next, choose the bulk of your shrubs and climbers from communities of plants that grow nearby and do well, either in neighbours' gardens or even in neglected corners in a town. It just needs a little research. Some shrubs such as buddleja are pioneer plants that colonise cracks in walls and fill them with flowers for butterflies. These tough plants will do well in any garden and may just need to be kept in check in warm humid environments where they can do too well and get out of hand.

Once you have the shrub layer of the garden, add hardy climbers such as roses, clematis or honeysuckle for additional height and a longer flowering/nectar period. You can tie them to wires or trellis fixed to a fence or just let them scramble among other plants as they would in the wild. □

BOOK DETAILS

This is an edited extract from the new book *Sustainable Garden: Projects, insights and Advice for the Eco-conscious Gardener* by Marian Boswall, with photographs by Jason Ingram (published by Frances Lincoln, £18).



How to create a layered border

A layered border not only looks beautiful but will become its own mini-ecosystem, providing support and nourishment for itself and the creatures that come to live in it

- If you have space, plant one tree for every six square metres. If you have plenty of room, choose trees that allow lots of light through their canopies.

- Start with a variety of ground-cover plants that are suitable for your soil, bearing in mind the amount of sun and rain available, and plant them to cover roughly 50 per cent of the ground.

- Add one shrub for every two square metres of space, mixing evergreens and flowering and your favourite fruiting shrubs to attract pollinators and feed animals and maybe yourself.

- Add in one or two mixes of perennials, ideally with three perennials and one grass in each mix, to flower in succession throughout the season. Choose a variety of heights and flower

shapes, from umbrella-shaped to spires and round daisies, to aid pollination as well as to look beautiful in your border.

- If you have gaps in the garden while the shrubs fill out, add in annuals for a splash of instant colour, to feed the bees and to protect the soil. They will seed where they are happy and create a dynamic feel to the planting as it changes. Where there is any space remaining, cover with a mulch of garden compost or fine composted bark.

- Water your plants in and keep their roots moist for the first three months after planting, until their roots are established (stick your finger deep into the soil to check for moisture before getting out the watering can). After that, they should only need water in the event of a severe drought.