

Allium 'Mount Everest' with its cream flower spheres standing proud, is a stately choice for a garden border

Relaxed Charm

To complement her informal family home, Marian Boswall has created a flowing garden, a green retreat from her busy life as a landscape architect

Words & photographs LEIGH CLAPP





‘The garden is more structured near to the house and becomes looser as we meld into the woodland areas’

Landscape architect Marian Boswall’s own garden in the Kent countryside reflects her philosophy of working with the setting and respecting the ecology of the land. ‘The garden is informal and comfortable, like the house,’ she says. ‘I have kept the Arts and Crafts feel and I use a lot of reclaimed items, from the large rusted metal water collector that used to be a boiler to the metal baths planted with cloud pruned topiary.’

When Marian and her husband Rupert bought the property 15 years ago, they could see the garden had wonderful potential. ‘It had been well loved but was tired and overgrown and we had some difficult choices to make, where beautiful trees had been planted but could not survive together to maturity,’ Marian explains. ‘We were, however, lucky to have mature hedges, as our views across the beautiful Low Weald Special Landscape Area come with the price of some fairly strong south westerlies up the valley. They give us shelter and create a microclimate within the garden.’

The decision early on was to keep as much existing structure as possible. This has paid off, as with the height of cover and mature trees, such as native hornbeam, *Carpinus betulus*, alder and beech, *Fagus sylvatica*, and exotics of Persian ironwood and Indian bean tree, *Catalpa bignonioides*, comes a wealth of wildlife. Marian renovated the areas of the garden closest to the house first, adding winter ➤

ABOVE Frothy *Alchemilla mollis* and lavender soften the edges of the path that leads to the patio and characterful house with its quirky symmetry, which dates from the 1490s and was extended in the 1940s



ABOVE An arching *Malus* ‘Golden Hornet’ provides shade for al fresco dining and gazing across the expanse of lawn and densely planted curvaceous borders

LEFT Clouds of *Aquilegia vulgaris* ‘Rose Barlow’, ‘Blue Barlow’ and ‘Ruby Port’ jostle in the breeze
RIGHT Marian with her cockers Misty and Nelson

Key facts

CHARACTER Informal, flowing planting with mature trees. Experimental planting and organic practices are employed
SIZE Two acres plus four acres of woodland
SOIL Heavy clay that hangs onto moisture and has been worked over the years
ASPECT All aspects in different areas
OWNERS Marian Boswall, a landscape architect (marianboswall.com) lives here with her husband Rupert and their two teenage children
DATE OF HOUSE 1490s medieval cottage extended in the 1940s, with Arts and Crafts-style touches added



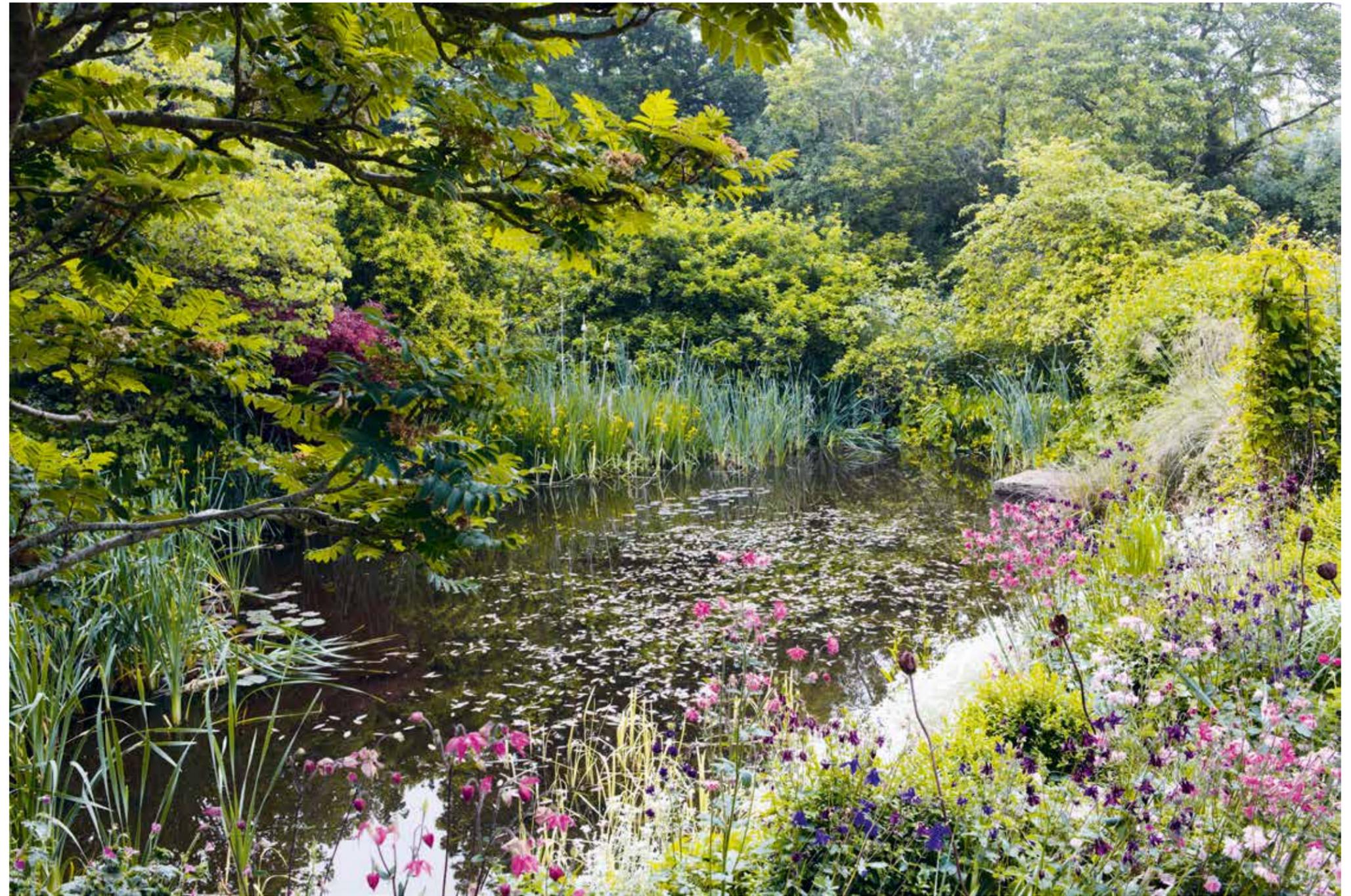


structure with shrubs such as clipped box, *Ilex* 'Silver Queen', ferns and hydrangeas, including her favourites *H. quercifolia* 'Snow Queen' and new variety *H. paniculata* 'Little Lime', as well as planting brightly coloured spring bulbs.

'The garden is more structured near the house and becomes looser as we meld into the woodland areas. It's often a surprise for people to find what lies behind the high hedge. It is a hidden garden, as the entrance looks as though it goes into the field and orchard but then you swing round to see the large lawn and borders beyond,' says Marian. 'We have a long south-facing border of new perennials and grasses, which were chosen for their appeal to bees and foragers through the seasons.'

Starting with *Camassia quamash*, *Allium* 'Globemaster' and *Melianthus major*, the border flowers all summer until its finale of *Rudbeckia fulgida*, *Agastache* 'Blackadder', *Sanguisorba officinalis* 'Red Thunder', *Verbena bonariensis* and *Veronicastrum virginicum*.

Meandering paths are softened at the edges by frothy planting, and seating areas are dotted around, such as an al fresco dining area on the rustic stone paving. Two ponds, one that had been a brick pit for the house, the other once a swimming pool, are a magnet for wildlife and encircled by marginal plant choices, including *Pontederia cordata*, *Butomis umbellatus*, *Ranunculus bulbosus*, *Iris pseudacorus* and ivory spires of *Camassia leichtlinii* 'Plena Alba'. 'I could spend hours early morning and late evening in spring and summer watching the dragonflies and damselflies, the water boatmen and the visiting kingfisher who sits in the crab apple tree and lets you get quite close before he disappears in a flash of blue,' says Marian. ➤



TOP LEFT Alliums mingle with spires of *Camassia leichtlinii* 'Plena Alba' in the garden borders

ABOVE A variety of trees, including *Sorbus aucuparia* 'Fastigiata', *Cercis siliquastrum*, and *Cydonia oblonga*, back the pond, while

marginal planting of *Iris pseudacorus*, beds of aquilegia and *Clematis* 'Princess Diana' scrambling up a support, also draw the eye
RIGHT An old vegetable plot, in the wilder meadow area of the garden, has a simple, rustic charm



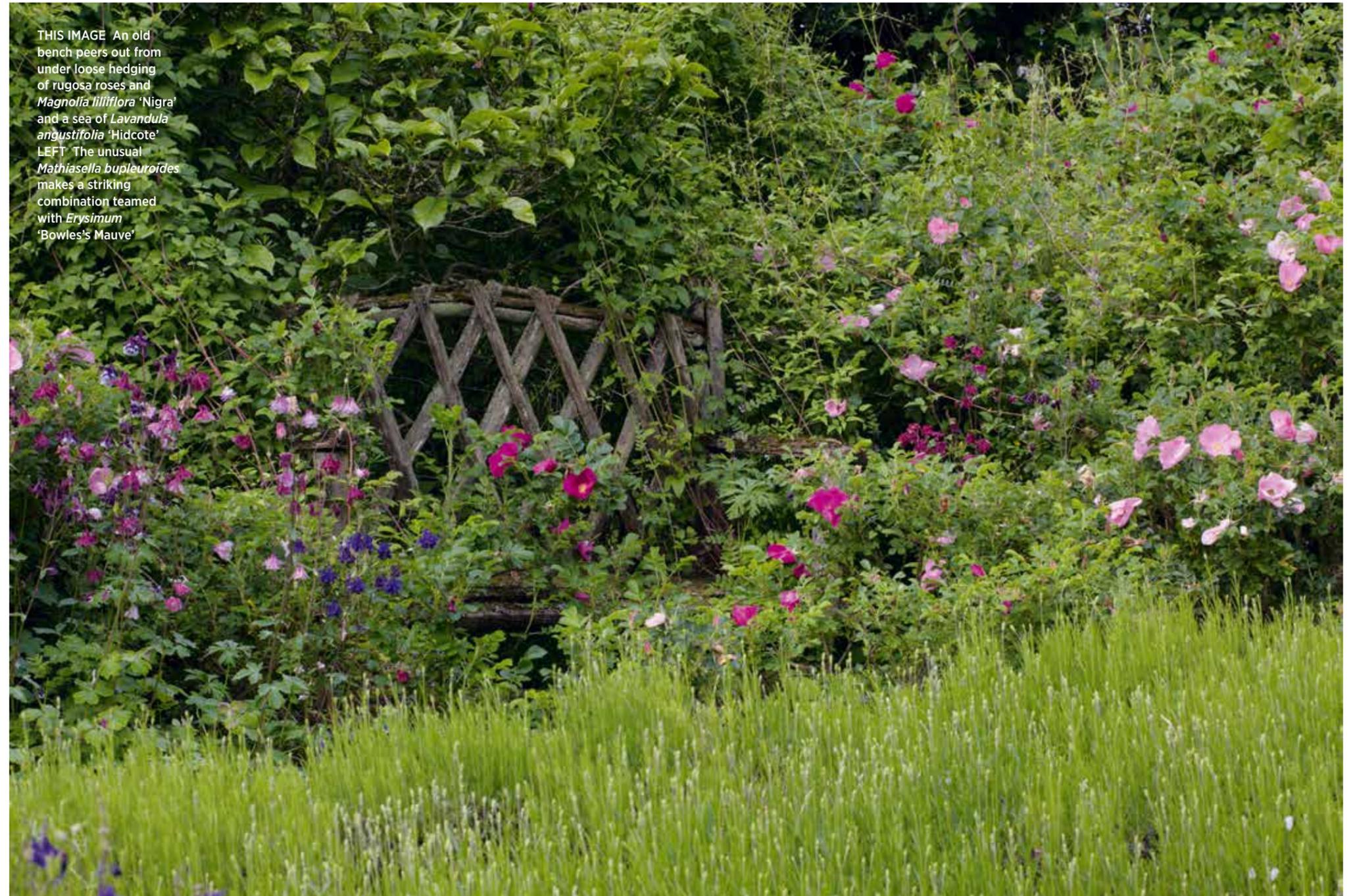
In the area

WHEELGATE NURSERY Specialising in hardy perennials and ornamental grasses. Orchard House, Claygate, Kent, TN12 9PJ (lerwill.com)

HOLE PARK GARDENS 15-acre private garden, with bluebell woodland and formal gardens. Rolvenden, Kent, TN17 4JA (01580 241344; holepark.com)

CHARLESTON Former home of the Bloomsbury Group, fresh uncomplicated planting. West Firle, Sussex, BN8 6LL (01323 811265; charleston.org.uk)

ST CLERE ESTATE Historic, classical gardens and borders. Kemsing, Kent, TN15 6NL (01732 761309; stclere.co.uk)



THIS IMAGE An old bench peers out from under loose hedging of rugosa roses and *Magnolia liliiflora* 'Nigra' and a sea of *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote'
 LEFT The unusual *Mathiasella bupleuroides* makes a striking combination teamed with *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve'

Gardening advice

- * Plant native hedging to encourage wildlife into your garden
- * Include in the planting lots of flowers for bees, such as alliums, foxgloves and poppies
- * Don't be too tidy around the garden – allow some element of self-seeding
- * Put in good structure and soften the edges with planting that billows over
- * Design planting closer to the house to suit the style of the property, but you can be more experimental further away
- * Mix planting schemes up a bit; for example, add a splash of yellow in a border of pink and blue
- * Work with the land: respect the history and what is indigenous to the site
- * Do no harm: whatever you add to the garden should be as beautiful as what was there before

Informing the overall design of the garden are influences from her training and practice. Following a career as an international management consultant, she decided to retrain in Garden History, Advanced Horticulture and Garden Design at Hadlow College and then studied Landscape Design at Greenwich University, followed by a Masters in Landscape Architecture. She now runs a practice from her home studio.

The garden acts as a canvas for Marian's ideas. 'As a designer, I am always experimenting with planting so there are constantly different combinations going on to see how plants will work together and what will thrive on our clay soil as well,' she explains. It is the joyous massed planting

that sets her garden apart. Jostling aquilegia blooms are animated by the slightest breeze, while spheres of purple and white alliums, punctuated by self-seeding foxgloves, also draw the eye, as do clumps of richly toned peonies and tumbling rugosa roses, as well as the unusual bracts of lime green *Mathiasella bupleuroides* that contrast with purple *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve'.

'One of the things I love about the garden is the different moods it has in different seasons, and at different times of day,' says Marian. 'In spring it is vibrant, abundant and packed with colour and scent, while for summer I have chosen quieter whites and blues that are cooling in the hot days and provide a restful feel.' ➤



LEFT Planting is in a relaxed Arts and Crafts style, to blend with the style of the house
 RIGHT A little vignette is created by a purple watering can surrounded by *Scutellaria incana*



Gardens



Plant palette

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Aquilegia vulgaris* 'Rose Barlow' is a lovely rich crimson; the pale yellow blooms of *Rosa* 'Buff Beauty' is a spreading medium-sized shrub; bulbous herbaceous perennial *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation' has a strong onion scent; *Helianthemum* 'Henfield Brilliant' produces bright orange flowers in spring and early summer; velvety *Rosa* 'Hot Chocolate' reaches about 90cm in height; cross hybridised pale pink aquilegia; *Paeonia peregrina* 'Otto Froebel' produces bowl-shaped vermilion flowers in early summer; airy *Anthriscus sylvestris* is a common British wild plant ↪

