

THE GARDEN DESIGN CO LTD

www.gardendesignco.co.uk

2016/2017 NEWSLETTER



FOR MORE
INFORMATION
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This image of the stunning bog garden at Orchard House has proved immensely popular, and even been featured in a 'Top Ten Garden Paths' article by an editor for Houzz.

THE GARDEN DESIGN COMPANY
CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF CREATIVITY

Plus

New for 2017 - your gardening year

NORMAL FOR NORFOLK?

CERTAINLY NOT!

2015 saw us implement a striking design for the rear garden of a stunning holiday home near the North Norfolk coast. However, having transformed the back garden, the front garden complete with 160m² of rutted block paving, left something to be desired.

So working alongside designer Jo Alderson Phillips, (www.joannealderson.com) with whom we have worked closely for many years, we embarked on a scheme that evolved into one of our most ambitious projects in 20 years.

With a cottage booked for six weeks, we emigrated to Norfolk, where the scheme envisaged 200t

of materials coming in and out of the garden.

This included 'crazy paving' but not as you know it from the 70's. Instead, sections of Caithness stone weighing up to 350kilos with dimensions of 1.2m across, were laid on a permeable sub-base and surrounded by permeable resin bound gravel. The striking scheme is a unique creation, with zero water run-off and the ultimate in cutting-edge sustainable urban drainage solutions.

Meanwhile basalt sets and locally sourced Norfolk cobbles allow the existing trees to take centre stage. To cap it all, the project finished a day early and under budget.





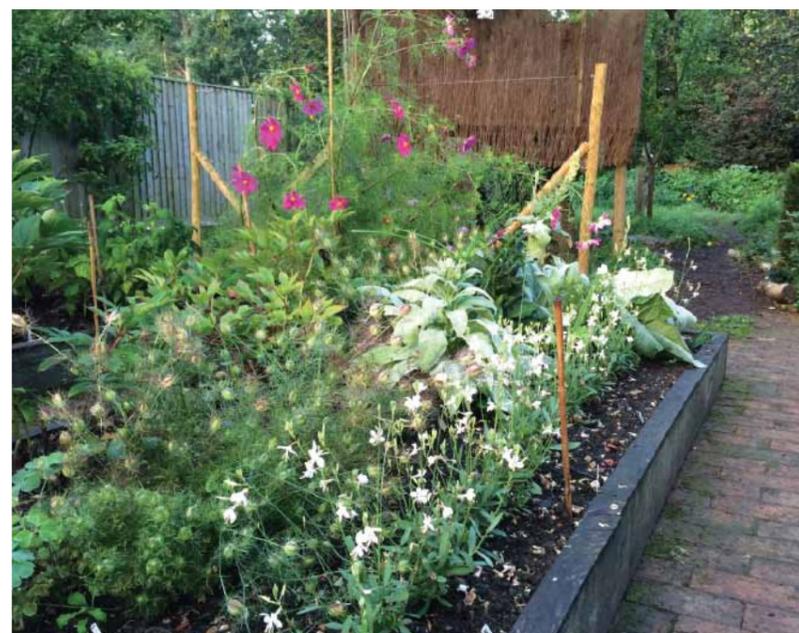
A NATIONAL CHALLENGE

Many may remember how Claire and I were inspired to help raise funds for our great nephew Leo in 2015 by opening our garden to the public. Well 350 people attended but far more importantly, Leo's proton treatment, to tackle his bladder cancer (diagnosed when he was only 4 months old), has been a success. So much so that when he heard that we had been invited to open the garden again (this time under the National Garden Scheme), he put on his ear defenders and helped us get the garden ready.

Sadly Leo could not fix the weather and it poured all day long, but this did not prevent us from raising over £500 for the NGS charities and Helen and Douglas House, helped in no small part by the very generous donations from suppliers.



Top: Plant stalls; **Right:** Little Leo now in recovery; **Below from top:** My drowned garden looking down to my man cave; cutflower bed filled with Gauras, Nigella and Cosmos



AFTER 20 YEARS, A CHANCE TO DIVERSIFY?



Carly and Paul on the beach at beautiful Sandbanks; **Below from top:** Sustainable Agapanthus display; home-grown Sweet Peas and the groom-to-be collecting driftwood.



Whenever a new member of staff joins the team, I stress from an early stage that rarely will you ever do the same thing twice with GDC - every project is unique.

So whilst I relish a challenge, many thought that I had overstepped the mark when I offered help with the flowers for my niece and goddaughter's wedding in the summer of 2016.

Whilst the phrase 'sustainability' is used so much these days, it's rarely used in the context of weddings. Carly's wedding, taking place in beautiful Sandbanks, promised to be a truly glamorous and fun filled affair. However, glamour should not equate with extravagant waste, and flowers grown in Kenya and flown in to be thrown away after a few days seemed just that.

Would it not be better to consider flower arrangements grown yourself or that lasted forever? So, dozens of Sweet Peas and Gysophilia plants were grown from seed, whilst white and blue Agapanthus, reflecting some very special holidays in South Africa that we had had with Carly, were grown on.

With the bride and groom being surf babes, the wedding had a seaside theme. So they were dispatched to scour the beaches of Dorset after the winter storms for driftwood, sand and shells to dress the arrangements. Hideous plastic containers were transformed by dressing them with adhesive images of weathered decking that we had installed in Norfolk in 2015. After months of coaxing, feeding and dead-heading, a sea of Agapanthus became the centre piece of the wedding venue.

Finally, cut flowers from my garden dressed the arch under which Paul and Carly were married, nurtured lovingly by my team, whilst I was on holiday the week before.

And what a party we had, with a sky and a sea that looked truly tropical. Meanwhile the bride and groom, parents and close friends each have a driftwood trough of Agapanthus, as a truly sustainable momento of a fabulous wedding.

HEDGES ON STILTS?

For instant privacy, these pleached trees provide a lovely natural way to screen your garden.

Trained over many years they are still far cheaper than building a wall (unless you can get Mexico to pay!) and are an excellent alternative to traditional hedging and fencing.

So I have to wait years for them to grow?

No. We can source trees that are already pleached and they come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

The starting point is a tree that's trained with a clear stem of 1.8m and then a canopy either with a flat profile or as a cube on top, usually about 1.2m square.

Why are they grown with a clear stem of 1.8m?

Planning permission is usually required for fences and walls more than 2m in height - even in Mexico - so at 1.8m the pleached head sits nicely on top of most boundary walls, instantly extending the amount of privacy you have.

But I have no wall?

No problem - pleached trees are also grown as panels providing a solid screen from the ground up. Alternatively, there are also half standards, which usually have a clear stem of 1m and are often useful in courtyards.



Above: pleached Beech trees; Opposite from top: 1.8m stem cubed Lime tree; half standard Hornbeams; pleached Pear trees

Where can I buy them?

We sell pleached trees through our sister company www.treeandgardengiftcompany.co.uk, although unlike the other trees on this site, you won't be able to put them in your basket and check out immediately. This is because they take many years to grow and so are often in short supply, because invariably people want 9 or 10 or even more to make a complete screen along a boundary. However, you can still identify the sort of pleached trees you want and we source them for you and then plant them, using our 25 years of experience to ensure they thrive.

So what's your favourite?

Pleached ornamental Pears are brilliant as they flower in early Spring, keep their leaves on until the end of November, are tolerant of pollution and colour up beautifully in the Autumn.

Meanwhile the Holm Oak is an excellent evergreen option, whilst Liquidamber produces simply the best Autumn colour.



20 YEARS ON

I still remember the months of preparation and business plans that led up to 1st May 1996, the day that The Garden Design Company Ltd was born. Twenty years on, it's easy to overlook the fact that we are one of the most well established design and build companies in the region.

Indeed our overriding philosophy has been that of bringing a truly professional approach to the industry. Unmarked, anonymous vans with staff in muddy trackies are not for us. Instead we take pride in our designs, our creations and in developing long term relations with designers, contractors, suppliers and, crucially, clients.

We have never really invested in advertising, preferring instead to rely on word of mouth and recommendation, that has been key from the start.

Small wonder then that GDC's family now includes a huge range of clients stretching back to the 1990's, and what great friends they are. I am never far away from the offer of tea and cake and a chance to catch up. With so much to do and so many to see I don't get to call as much as I would like to, so for that please accept my apologies.

But crucially to everyone who has helped us enjoy such success and given us such fun over the last 20 years, thank you.

THE JOY OF MEADOWS

Imagine a ploughed field and a packet of seed. And then a meadow emerges. Invariably irresistible, these images of meadows look deceptively simple. However, having been creating them for more than 10 years, I assure you they are not. We love them and I think we're getting quite good at them, but maybe the best judge of that is you.....



This page: Wild Geraniums; **Opposite - clockwise from top:** before; six months later; Wild Mallow; a Strandkorb in the Cotswolds; our smallest meadow in the centre of High Wycombe; bees foraging

NEVER QUITE FINISHED?

Despite having worked on this garden since 2009, there is always something at this large estate to develop or improve upon and with five acres of garden wrapping around the house, there were several entrances from the front to the rear garden. However, it was never quite clear which was the main entrance.

So, having previously planted some stunning pleached Hornbeams, five years later a matching set was found from the same batch (thank goodness for good record keeping) and a stunning new entrance created.

A mosaic of black basalt sets off the bespoke gates created by The Garden Trellis Company, which feature brushed stainless steel portholes (remember the windows in BBC Playschool?) and a hedgehog hole, to allow the easy passage of these wonderful slug-devouring creatures. Smart and stylish, at last the garden has an entrance to be proud of.

Meanwhile, the amenity area dominated by a bore-hole and shed was transformed into an extension of the existing kitchen garden.



Please come and see for yourself when the garden is open for the first time on a weekend under the National Garden Scheme, on **SUNDAY 18th JUNE 2017**. Tea and cake will of course be available, as well as an extensive plant stall. Visit this garden at Orchard House, Amersham, HP7 0LB.



The garden entrance before

Traditionally, many designers work in an isolated bubble. But for us years ago it soon became apparent that working collaboratively created solutions to problems, and frankly was so much more enjoyable.

The same can be said of suppliers and contractors. As such, we have had a fabulous working relationship with The Garden Trellis Company over the years, who have created a series of bespoke products to complement our designs.

Opposite page from top: bespoke gates; new entrance with raised beds and stunning pleached Hornbeams; **Above from top:** smart and stylish kitchen garden; the entrance before.



Plan your project with the garden joinery experts



As one of the most established garden joinery makers in the UK, we love to help design and create the most attractive gardens and outdoor living spaces using the natural beauty of wood. For trellis, fencing, planters and other garden features we offer a range of products and services to suit every project; from the distinctive tailoring of bespoke joinery to our popular ready-made range available to buy online.

Plan your project at www.gardentrellis.co.uk or call us on 01255 688 361

MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

JANUARY



For maximum effect, cut off last year's Hellebore leaves to appreciate the stunning flowers, and cut and float them in glass vases.

Plant 'in the green' bulbs e.g. Snowdrops and Aconites.

Force Rhubarb.

FEBRUARY



Sow tomatoes. A little heat underneath the trays in a greenhouse or on a sunny window sill and they will soon start to emerge.

It's also the last month to winter prune that Wisteria to encourage flowers rather than leaf.

MARCH



Harvest your forced Rhubarb and plant Bluebells 'in the green.' Spray your Box hedge with our special plant tonic to maximise resistance to Box blight.

Feed borders with pelleted poultry manure and start the first spring/summer lawn fertiliser applications.

APRIL



Apply specialist Nematode treatments the organic way to protect against slugs, BEFORE damage is seen.

Pinch out and harden off Sweet Peas and make some wigwams from Beech and Hazel.

MAY



Order adult and larvae of ladybirds to combat aphids, before they explode.

Tackle the Ground Elder and Bindweed.

Cut leaves off bulbs six weeks after flowering.

JUNE



Remove unwanted guests from wild flower meadows, especially Docks and Thistles.

Dead head Roses to ensure repeat flowering all season long.

Last picking of Asparagus 21st June.

JULY

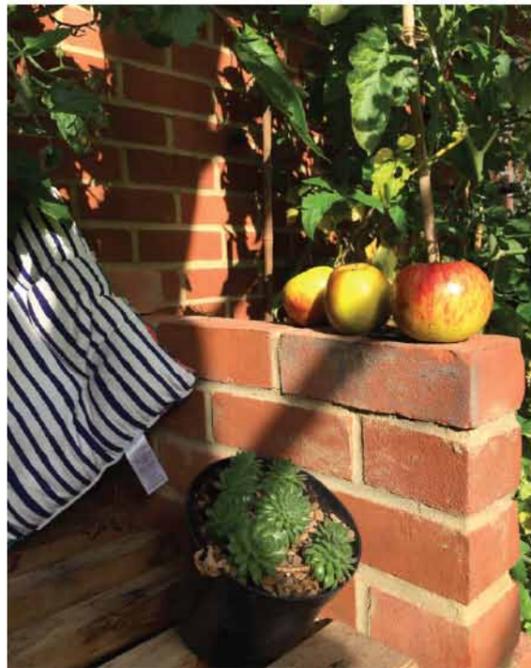


Cut Cosmos and Sweet Peas regularly early in the morning.

Remove seed heads and tendrils off Sweet Peas.

Feed flowering plants with organic seaweed for continued blooming.

Trim Box topiary and hedging as late as possible to reduce the incidence of Box blight.



A PLACE TO SIT

There is nowhere quite like the garden for quiet reflection, or just simply sitting with the newspaper on a sunny Sunday morning. In short, no garden is complete without a place to sit.

We have created many such places over the years. Here is a selection of our favourites.

Clockwise from top: a Standkorb (German beach seat) in the Cotswolds; the bespoke swing in the bog garden at Orchard House; my man cave; bespoke green oak seat by Ed Brooks and the late Franco (2002-2016, RIP).

Tear here



AUGUST

Prune Wisteria.

Keep dead-heading those plants, and continue to water containers – a glass of something in hand helps the process.

Order Artic King, a great winter lettuce, and autumn bulbs.

Feed Runner Beans with Seaweed extract.

SEPTEMBER

Japanese Maples make great garden features. They are at their best for the next couple of months.

They are slow growing, so select specimens over the next few months, to plant in the winter.

OCTOBER

Order Yellow Rattle for your wildflower meadow and start your autumn/winter lawn care with targeted fertiliser and aeration.

Mulch borders for winter to retain soil heat, and build leaf bins.

NOVEMBER

Sow your Sweet Peas and order bulbs in the green, bare rooted hedging and trees.

Best month for Tulip planting, but ensure they are planted 20cm deep with bonemeal.

DECEMBER

Plant deciduous trees, shrubs, hedging and Roses, which will thrive next Spring if planted before the ground freezes.

Prune fruit trees.

Cut back herbaceous borders before bulbs emerge.

Send the mower to be serviced before Spring!

WHAT JONATHAN SAYS

Jonathan works as the maintenance manager for GDC, ensuring our clients gardens stay looking top notch.

“After more than 15 years of hands on horticultural experience in nurseries and private gardens, I take great pride in my own work and in providing high standards of plant care to GDC clients.

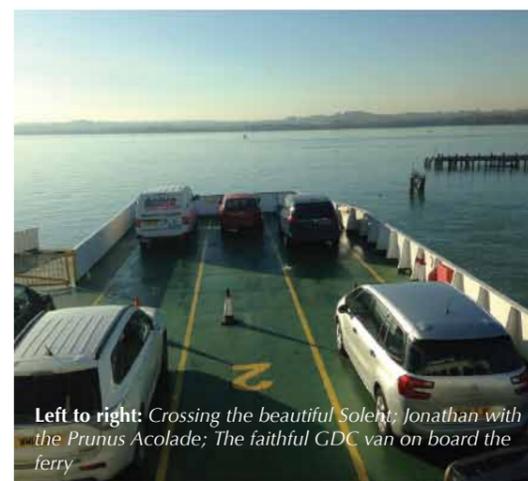
The right plant in the right place is a good start, but it will do so much better with the right care. Pests and diseases are an occupational hazard but good husbandry minimises this risk, whilst knowing what to do when something nasty strikes is reassuring for our clients. Working with such a well established company, and with such a wide range of clients is immensely satisfying.

What we do is a classic ‘art and craft,’ and one that is increasingly respected as people see the shortcomings of the ‘mow and blow’ brigade.

Tear here

BREXIT - AN OPPORTUNITY?

Following the shock result in June, the world has not ended; however, the fall in the pound will certainly increase plant costs, as so many are grown on the Continent. Indeed, many trees and shrubs grown by British nurseries start life abroad, and perversely one of our UK growers has already achieved record export sales of their trees back to Europe with the weak pound enticing European buyers to England.



Left to right: Crossing the beautiful Solent; Jonathan with the Prunus Acolade; The faithful GDC van on board the ferry



So imagine our delight when our sister company, The Tree and Garden Gift Company, received two export orders for our trees, albeit to the Isle of Wight and Ayrshire. For whilst the mainland was frozen with early frosts in late November, balmy conditions and blue skies greeted Jonathan and Sam as they cruised across the Solent to plant a stunning Prunus Accolade.

THE TREE AND GARDEN GIFT COMPANY



The Tree and Garden Gift Company provides a unique and easy solution for choosing and planting trees, whether for yourself or a friend. Whether you are looking for the perfect christening or retirement present, a Christmas gift or an original wedding list option, these gifts will last and last.

The Tree and Garden Gift Company will help you find a well considered and meaningful gift for a loved one. Advice is also available on the site to help with positioning, soil type and of course look, with a choice of trees up to 16 feet in height, the vast majority of which are UK grown.

All the inspiration, ideas and advice you will need to both buy and have planted, the perfect and lifelong tree of your choice are a few clicks away with www.treeandgardengiftcompany.co.uk.



20 YEARS ON AND ROB REVEALS ALL....

1

What is your earliest memory of gardening?

My mother screaming at me as my football snapped her Azaleas. Then there was the rigid pond liner complete with plastic waterfall and rockery, that I had to clean out every year, saving the goldfish won at Pinner fair.

And then The Garden Design Company germinated?

Not quite - a garden centre in Marlow appointed me as a manager to set up a design and build company. Such a concept was very novel then and they showed great foresight but fortunately little insight into all the mistakes I made early on. The Garden Design Company Ltd was born four years later on 1st May 1996 and was my own baby, albeit in those days still based at the garden centre.

Who started your love of gardening?

Both of my grandparents had large timber greenhouses. One had his own gardener and would save his bedding Geraniums each year whilst the other worked on Lord Litchfield's estate at Shugborough where robins and blue tits would share his lunch inside his garden shed.

Who inspired you?

Dan Pearson's BBC 2 series 'Home Farm' was an inspiring program that really started the creative juices flowing, whilst early meetings with Rosemary Verey at Barnsely House drummed into me the need to design with successional flowering in mind. Then in the late 90's I met Beth Chatto who is still a legendary plantswoman. Of course Geoff Hamilton was classic old school, ignoring his love of wiggly hoses to lay out irregular borders.

Did you leave school and then start designing?

Not quite, originally I practised as a lawyer, specialising in medical negligence and medical crime - misuse of drugs, euthanasia, sexual assaults, suicides. Pleasant sort of stuff really.



How has business changed in 20 years?

Initially it was a bit 'hand to mouth' but our reputation for professionalism has meant that we don't advertise, instead relying on word of mouth, repeat business and referrals. In turn some great friendships have ensued, and time is spent nurturing these over coffee and cake rather than scrambling around for crumbs as you grapple with another tender where the developer is only interested in one thing.

So how did you get from lawyer to garden design?

Window boxes and hanging baskets were all the rage in London. So I would drive my Golf GTI to new Covent Garden Market, load the car with Bizzy Lizzies and Grandads Geraniums and park in an underground car park. Changing into a suit I became a lawyer for 12 hours and then would drive home, squat in a friend's greenhouse and make hanging baskets that I sold at weekends to local garden centres and nurseries.

Anything exciting on the horizon?

We've just finished planting 3500 plants in an area of open woodland in an estate near Amersham. I have been working on the palette of plants for over a year, reflecting the habitat, soil and aspect to create a naturalistic scheme to follow on from the carpet of Forget Me Knots and wild Violets that flower in the Spring. Really unusual Eryngiums, Penstemons and Echinacea should flower for four or five months from mid summer.

So when did you make the leap?

In the early 1990's I had the chance to buy one of the nurseries I supplied, but the figures did not add up as interest rates were then 15%. So I decided to study horticulture and garden design for a year at Pershore. Student life again reigned supreme, complete with labrador and GTI. Bliss.

Any regrets?

None at all. Starting my own business when I did enabled me the freedom to bring up Alex (pictured above) and Charlotte and sneak off on a Wednesday afternoon to watch rugby matches and muck out the pony. Ironically they are now both at college (Charlotte studying veterinary science at Nottingham - which is what I really wanted to do!), and the business continues to grow at an astonishing rate.