



Hot summer colour

Leigh Clapp visits an expressive, vibrant garden in Harbridge that echoes the owner's cheerful personality

Above: The circular entrance to the garden allows a glimpse to the colourful profusion

At the peak of summer, strong, bright colours shine in the more intense light and this is a great time to appreciate sun-tough, reliable plants. Invigorating, hot colours imbue a garden with both warmth and energy.

Braemoor garden in Harbridge exemplifies this with its joyous jumble of hues. Owner, professional gardener and nursery woman, Tracy Netherway clearly has a passion for plants and their natural exuberance. "The garden probably does express my personality. I'm naturally a very cheerful person. I love bright colours and large plants. I rarely grow a

dwarf plant if there's a large version available," she enthuses.

Starting from scratch

The garden has been developed over the past six years from a rather overgrown, neglected space to one brimming with thriving plants and interesting areas. Although the garden is very much Tracy's vision, her husband John has helped with the heavy work, such as laying the patio and her mother Judy, who lives in the attached annex, is also a willing helper.

"The house had been empty for a year before we bought it. It had probably been a nice garden in its time but had become ▶



Above: Tracy added a beach-inspired area as a fun place to sit surrounded by the sunny planting. **Below:** Massed daisies
Photographs by Leigh Clapp

neglected and by the time we moved in it was full of nettles, brambles and a number of very large conifers, which we had to clear before we started. We also had to modernise the house, which meant we lived on a building site for a good many months. I preferred having to start the garden from scratch again, having a ready-made garden would not have been enough of a challenge,” Tracy remembers.

A passion for plants

The garden evolved slowly, led by the desire to accommodate a large palette of plants. “I just love plants – collecting them, growing them, admiring them,” Tracy explains. Having grown up with a family of keen gardeners and with her own childhood patch to work on, it was clear that Tracy’s career path would lead to becoming a professional gardener. After 20 years of being a contract gardener Tracy opened the nursery in 2005. “Although part of me misses helping other people

with their gardens, it is growing plants that really interests me,” she adds.

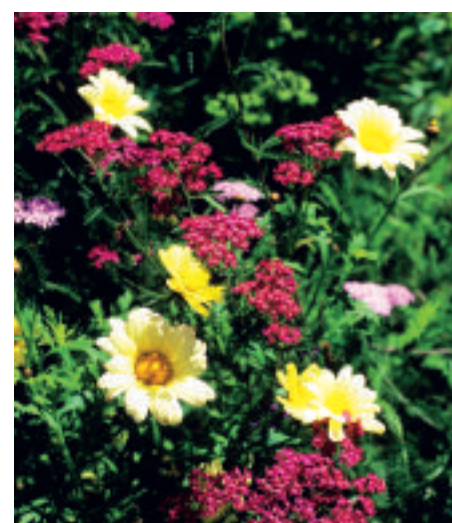
Asking Tracy where other influences come from she replies: “My inspiration doesn’t come from one source. Sometimes just a picture in a magazine can set me thinking. I love visiting other gardens, it’s fascinating to see the way other people use their spaces and of course the television can show you gardens you could never manage to visit. I suppose my particular style is country cottage, although I appreciate formal gardens I could never be that restrained and precise. I like mixed plantings – of plants and colours, and colour co-ordination never crosses my mind.”

Structure, to act as foils to the plants and define areas in the garden, is provided by paving, gravel and a circular lawn, along with some unique additions. In one area Tracy has built a very natural looking stream to emulate a Scottish rocky burn and in another there is a





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beach theme with a small raised deck. “Gardening always gives you something to do and something to look at. Our garden is never exactly the same two years in a row, where would the fun be in that! There’s always something new to try – a new design, a new feature or planting scheme,” she laughs.

Rural inspiration

Last year Tracy created an unusual entrance to the garden with a large metal circular frame. It was a surprise to learn what its former use had been. “I had seen a beautiful moongate in Dorset, made of purbeck stone but I knew that something made of stone would be completely out of place here. I thought about it for a few months and then one day when I was out on my bike down the lane here, I saw cattle feeding rings in the fields and I just knew that they would be just the thing in our rural, farming environment, and that is exactly what the entrance is – a cut off

cattle feeding ring,” she explains.

However it is the plants that are the stars of the show. Mass planted, mostly herbaceous perennials thrive as they jostle together in the breeze. The garden is very exposed to the elements, with little shade, making it ideal for bold, hot summer splashes of colour. Luckily the plants are given a good start in the gravelly, free-draining, dry, acid soil by digging in plenty of manure and compost when they are planted. ■

Opening times

Braemoor, Harbridge, Fordingbridge
 Open July 4, 6, 25, 27
 August 22, 24 (2pm to 5.30pm)
 Admission £2.50, children free
 The National Gardens Scheme
www.ngs.org.uk
 Visitors welcome by appointment
 Small adjacent nursery
 Tel: 01425 652983

Top: The neat edged circular lawn is a foil to the exuberance of the dense planting.

Above left: Sweet peas against a bright summer sky. **Above right:** Sun-tough daisies and achillea