

FREE WITH THE EVENING STANDARD

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**Terence Conran
on his Chelsea Flower
Show garden**

The Chanel girl's London

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urban gardening gets groovy

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUKE WHITE

THERE'S A NEW BREED OF GARDENER – YOUNG, HIP AND URBAN. SALLY BRAMPTON TALKS TO

'You don't have to be an anorak to be a gardener,' says Tim Richardson, editor of *New Eden*, a new garden magazine aimed at a generation who are 'very design savvy'. Thirty-one-year-old Richardson used to feel like a 'total weirdo'.

'Five years ago people openly laughed at me because I was interested in gardening. I was a sort of idiotic Percy Thrower figure. Now there are more and more people like me.'

He's right: only recently three garden magazines have been launched within six weeks of each other. But while *Garden Ideas* and *Garden Inspirations* are still haunting the herbaceous borders of Sissinghurst culture, *New Eden* is determinedly urban and young. So instead of ten ideas for container planting, there's a glass and steel Zen garden, a page devoted to garden Internet sites, and a single daisy photographed with the same gloss that *Vogue* would lavish on a Manolo shoe.

It's the firmest indication so far of a new breed – twenty- and thirty-somethings who know that grasses are groovy and that purple is the colour of the season. They talk of brushed aluminium, gravel gauges and architectural planting. For them, gardening is as important as fashion, interiors or architecture.

A large part of this trend is the emphasis on urban gardening. The London skyline is sprouting with palms, bamboos and grasses as a new generation of flat dwellers moves out onto the rooftops or creates miniature jungles at ground level. Architectural planting is hip, and nowhere more so than London. Joe Swift, a 33-year-old garden

designer, opened the Plant Room, a small shop and specialist nursery in Islington, last year. 'Young people are looking for a much cleaner look. We stock plants which grow well in small London gardens. The microclimate in London means that the temperature is two to three degrees higher than in the rest of the country, so you can grow tree ferns, banana palms and olive trees – stuff that you couldn't grow elsewhere.' There's even a computer in the corner of the shop where you can search a database for a particular plant.

Next week is the Chelsea Flower Show, the gardening equivalent of Paris Fashion Week. The showcase of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), Chelsea is not renowned for its cutting-edge ideas. That is changing. In the last couple of years, Yves Saint Laurent and Chanel were both invited to design gardens, while avant-garde designers like Dan Pearson and Christopher Bradley Hole have renounced the romantic English garden in favour of a hard-edged urban model.

But what is really generating change among the young is the idea of the garden as an outdoor room. Anne-Marie Powell, 28, a garden designer and presenter of Channel 4's *Real Gardens*, says: 'Young people are interested in fashion as a whole, not just their home but the space outside their house.'

Tim Richardson agrees: 'There have been mini-booms in gardening popularity before, but now it's much more commercial, which indicates that people are really taking it seriously.'

Andy Sturgeon, a hip 33-year-old garden designer, was the first to anticipate the new breed of young gardeners in last year's book, *Planted* (Hodder & Stoughton, £20). The black and white jacket with its surrealist mugshot of a bald man with a tiny flowerpot perched on his head is up there with a *Comme des Garçons* ad campaign. 'The average age of new RHS members is now about 30. It's the same at Chelsea Physic Garden, which was completely unheard of. It used to be only my friends' mums who talked to me about my work. Suddenly, it was my friends themselves who were asking me questions,

but none of them could relate to the gardening books that were available. So I wrote one.'

Despite its off-the-wall images (tattoos, horses, wallabies), *Planted* is an intensely practical book that talks to a new generation.

Sturgeon preaches the gospel – chemical-free, organic, peat-free – of an ecologically aware generation and believes that environmental awareness is at the heart of everything. 'It's all interlinked, particularly for young urban people who have very little contact with nature. Plus, it's really good stress relief.'

Planted has been made into a television series by Carlton and, like the book, is targeted at a younger age group – 25 to 35. 'We want it to appeal to new gardeners as well as existing ones, and for it to be realistic. So it's not going to be, "Right, we'll do up your garden while your

husband's on his way back from the airport and it'll cost you a tenner".'

With lifestyle programming dominating the television schedules, every channel now has a garden slot. Channel 4 has *Real Gardens* and promises a new series, *Lost Gardens*. There's *Instant Gardens* on Channel 5, *Ground Force* and *Changing Rooms In The Garden* on BBC1 and *Gardeners' World* on BBC2. The makeover programmes have helped to loosen up ideas. 'In the past,' says Andy Sturgeon, 'if you'd said, "I want to paint this fence dark green", they'd be terrified, whereas now you can say anything and they'll go, "Yeah, okay".'

But elsewhere, such programmes get a poor press from garden designers, partly because they're so naff but also because they create unrealistic expectations. According to Joe Swift: 'Everybody thinks it costs £700 to have a new garden. Yeah, right. Labour costs? Hello!'

Swift trained as a landscape specialist and worked for a time in Australia, where ten per cent of the building budget is allocated to the garden. 'I don't believe that'll ever happen here, but people do need to plan their space instead of messing around. You'd never plan a kitchen like that, or a bathroom; you'd think of the whole space at once.'

Anne-Marie Powell, who also specialises in hardscaping (stonework, sculpture, stones etc), agrees: 'People go to a garden centre and think, "I like that plant, and that, and that", they bung them together and then they think, "Oh, I don't like my garden". You don't go shopping for clothes and buy a skirt, top and scarf without thinking how they work together. If you do, it'll be a clashing mess. It's the same with a garden.'

Garden centres are bewildering and seductive to inexperienced gardeners. 'They push stuff while it's in flower, or put plants by the till, and it's so easy to be tempted by something that won't work. Garden centres think it's great if the customer puts something in the wrong place and it dies – then they get more business.'

'There's far too much mystique around gardening,' says Joe Swift. 'You get a label that says "full sun". But it might

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designer, opened the Plant Room, a small shop and specialist nursery in Islington, last year. 'Young people are looking for a much cleaner look. We stock plants which grow well in small London gardens. The microclimate in London means that the temperature is two to three degrees higher than in the rest of the country, so you can grow tree ferns, banana palms and olive trees – stuff that you couldn't grow elsewhere.' There's even a computer in the corner of the shop where you can search a database for a particular plant.

Horticulture is also entering the style mainstream.



New growth: publications like *New Eden* and *Planted* (above) are aimed at the new generation of twenty- and thirty-something gardeners, and the industry is attracting young, urban designers such as (clockwise, from top left) Andy Sturgeon, Claire Lloyd, Joe Swift and Anne-Marie Powell



grow even in full shade; it'll just grow differently.' Tim Richardson maintains there's a vested interest in making gardening out to be technical and difficult, 'like alfresco DIY. We're trying to show people that you don't have to be a man in a shed growing giant leeks. You can actually do it in a fairly relaxed, enjoyable way. Once you discover that you get hooked.'

Claire Lloyd, an art director and the author of *Sensual Living*, lives in an all-white concrete house. A case study in minimalism, her house spills out into a small, walled terrace. Lloyd had the original yard covered with white concrete and set with deep rectangular flowerbeds. Architectural key points are three mop-headed standard bay trees and large aluminium planters, purple alliums, tall bamboos and black grasses. Supremely chic, her garden is an object lesson in discipline, except that, recently, more plants have started to creep in. Lloyd, who won't allow an ornament in her rigorously edited house, admits that when it comes to plants, she's a push-over.

'A garden becomes really precious to people,' says Tim Richardson. 'They'd never go into work on a

Monday and say, "Oh, I spent a lovely Sunday in the living room." People get a real sense of achievement from planting something, which you don't get from buying a cushion.'

And it's that, more than trends or outside rooms, which is attracting a new generation. Anne-Marie Powell was in her teens when she first got the gardening bug. 'When I started my first garden I thought this is dynamic, effervescent and ever-changing. The garden is a growing thing that needs nurturing and looking after. If you do that it will really shine for you, and that's fascinating.'

And while most people still ask designers for traditional gardens, it's often because that's all they know.

'When you talk to them about their space,' says Anne-Marie Powell, 'and explain what the possibilities are, their faces light up. There are so many materials you can use in a garden, like crushed glass as a surfacing material. Or concrete, which you can use in different plastering techniques in the same way you do in a house.'

'People are breaking out of the historic idea of the garden as a patch of lawn and four narrow herbaceous borders,' says Joe Swift. 'Younger people look at things in a different way. They don't have that very fixed idea of how a garden should look.'

The possibilities are limitless, but what every gardener emphasises is the importance of the plants. 'It's great to break new ground but in the end it's about gardening, not gardens,' says Tim Richardson.

'Walk down any street and you'll find examples of incredible sophisticated gardens using colour, texture and form. People aren't copying, they're creating in an incredibly personal and unpretentious way. That's the joy of it.'

According to Andy Sturgeon: 'Things are in danger of getting so heavily designed that people stop doing it for themselves. That's why I admire Christopher Lloyd, who's in his seventies. He won't conform to the taste school, he'll say, "Sod it", and do it anyway, which is great because there are no rights or wrongs. Gardening is gardening. It seems a bit poncy to turn it into a style statement!'

POT LUCK

Pot-gardening is a natural choice for cramped city conditions and London has seen a boom in garden outlets to cater for every taste. Tart and shiny factory-made terracotta is perfectly serviceable, though hand-made is much more beautiful and weathers gracefully. Specialist garden shops like Avant Garden and the Plant Room increasingly offer funky modern shapes, such as rimless 'long toms', camellia pots and tall, straight-sided pots for topiary shrubs. Pots and Pithoi import more than 12,000 hand-made Cretan pots in 230 shapes and sizes (you can buy them through Clifton Nurseries). Glazed ceramic pots come in strong blues, greens and shimmering turquoises, and a terrific choice of shapes; or you can opt for galvanised-steel florists' buckets from stockists like Chivers Flowers and Woodhams or old wash tubs from the Conran Shop.

Here are some places to look for pots and what to put in them:

- Avant Garden**
77 Ledbury Road, W11
(0171-229 4408).
- Barbary Pots**
45 Fernshaw Road, SW10
(0171-352 1053).
- The Chelsea Gardener**
125 Sydney Street, SW3
(0171-352 5656).
- Chivers Flowers**
43-45 Charlotte Street, W1
(0171-580 1761).
- Clifton Nurseries**
5A Clifton Villas, W9 (0171-289 6851).
- The Conran Shop**
55 Marylebone High Street, W1
(0171-723 2223), and 81 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-589 7401).
- Fulham Palace Garden Centre**
Bishops Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6 (0171-736 2640).
- H Crowther Ltd**
5 High Road, W4 (0181-994 2326).
- Half Price Pot Shop**
22-23 Aylmer Parade, Aylmer Road, N2
(0181-341 2716).
- The Plant Room**
47 Barnsbury Street, N1
(0171-700 6766).
- Pots and Pithoi**
The Barns, East Street, Turners Hill, West Sussex (01342 714 793).
- Red Mud Pottery & Lighting**
Units C & D, Linton House, 39-51 Highgate Road, NW5 (for stockists, call 0171-2671689).
- RHS Plant Centre**
Wisley, Surrey (01483 211 113).
- S & B Evans & Sons**
7a Ezra Street, E2 (0171-729 6635).
Open Fridays, and Sunday mornings with a 'seconds' sale on the first Sunday of each month.
- Spanish Pots**
265 Mitcham Lane, SW16
(0181-664 6602).
- Woodhams**
One Aldwych, WC2 (0171-300 0777).

JENNIFER POTTER

GARDEN TRENDS IN 1999

'I think tropical and exotic plants will be popular – like *Actinidia deliciosa* (kiwi fruit) – and so will woodland plants. My favourite is *Cimicifuga simplex*, particularly Brunette, which has really brown, purplish foliage.' Anne-Marie Powell

'Large architectural plants like date and banana palms will be big, so will tree ferns. Topiary is coming back, but in weird, funky shapes. Hot colours – flame orange, red, yellow – rather than pastels are popular. People are much bolder now about throwing things together rather than being too anal.' Joe Swift

'Grasses and architectural plants are about to hit the horticultural high street. Tree ferns are a bit last year, but will probably still be around this year. Metallic-blue plants like sea hollies will be important, and the next big thing will be daisies.' Andy Sturgeon

'Coloured marbles, whites, neutrals and strong bright colours.' Royal Horticultural Society

'Pink, woven, Indian, and ceramic are four trends we've identified for outdoor decoration. The plants of the season include agave and echinops, both of which are a metallic blue.'

Tim Richardson, editor of *New Eden*