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## Going for Gold

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# The shock of the new

Gardening has always been rooted firmly in the past, with gardeners themselves resistant – or simply oblivious – to change. But now, says Andy Sturgeon, the future is forcing its way into our back yards







Stephen Woodhams' Yardley Garden, shown at Chelsea 1997, featured a cobble-filled moat and Tulipa recreada in galvanised containers



For centuries, the green fingered have potted along in their green wellies. The biggest changes we have seen are such innovations as miniature Ballerina apple trees (so even patio gardeners can pick their own), topiary elephants and bicycles (ousting the traditional peacocks), ready-grown 'plug' seedlings and, of course, the rise and rise of organic gardening. A bit of a boomerang innovation that, as it takes us right back to where we began - letting nature, rather than agrichemical companies, dictate the way we garden. But now, whether we like it or not, the gales of change are rustling our leaves and rattling our trelliswork.

As we hurtle towards the millennium, horticulture has exploded - we spend over £3bn each year preening our patches. In the past three years, RHS membership has swollen by 30 percent to more than 260,000 and Gardeners Question Time shares the airwaves with more than 65 other gardening radio programmes. And with this eruption of interest we can see revolution in every area - from garden design and green genes, to designer gizmos.







## Ancient and modern

This reflective garden for The Daily Telegraph at Chelsea this year, Michael Balston acknowledges the past and ponders the future, offering a fusion of traditional and contemporary. He sets out to celebrate the forthcoming century, exploring the combination of a modern architectural form with lush, traditionally inspired planting. His garden uses modern materials and engineering techniques that, he predicts, will become more widespread in the 21st century. An elliptical stainless-steel wall stands on a stone terrace shaded by a leaf-shaped canopy, stretching over curving steel ribs and bound together by

steel spirals. Vertical steel masts supporting canvas drapes cast dramatic shadows over the garden to complement this ground-breaking vision.

Although garden designers have been around for centuries, it's really only in the past five years that today's generation has become widely accepted as professionals. The colleges are churning out graduates in droves and this competition means there's a hitherto unknown edge to the whole concept of garden design. And among some clients at least, expectations have changed, allowing designers like Balston a freer range. We're more prepared, say, to rip up grass and put down gravel, to consider different shapes and plantings and use different materials. →

**ABOVE** Oh-oh! Those Teletubbies haven't done the gardening for a while... Michael Balston's garden sports a man-made mount planted with box, and spiral path leading to the summit  
**LEFT** Details from Balston's digitally-designed, 21st-century garden for The Daily Telegraph





Arabella Lennox-Boyd's  
Evening Standard Garden,  
on display at Chelsea  
1998, brings innovative  
sculpture to the back door






## Make mine metal

There are only a limited number of ways you can use reclaimed railway sleepers, trellis, York stone or brick. So I'm overjoyed that, at last, designers have some truly inspiring ideas and the materials to execute them with. A friendly sheet-metal fabricator will often knock you up a chrome rill; galvanised gazebos are available off-the-peg from companies like Room In The Garden, and last year at Chelsea, Arabella Lennox-Boyd showed us this marvellous stainless-steel fountain (left) that was a piece of sculpture in its own right.

Today, timber decking – a North American favourite – has finally caught on; mosaic, introduced to us by the Romans, has made a comeback, and glass gravel – made of crushed windscreens – has appeared. It's no more scratchy than gravel, according to fans. Garden furniture, thank goodness, comes in more than white plastic and sculpture-wise, that small, concrete Venus no longer stands alone. A trellis or fence doesn't have to be treated with a fake-tan orange stain; now, you can choose pretty well any colour you want.

When it comes to children's play areas, the new generation isn't interested in swings and sandpits. Kids want funk in the garden – like a giraffe climbing frame that stands on a set of brightly coloured shock-absorbing tiles. →





Wire sheep meets bright,  
white daisies and green  
genes in The Country Life  
garden, at Chelsea 1997.  
Designed by Rupert Golby

## Laying down lawn

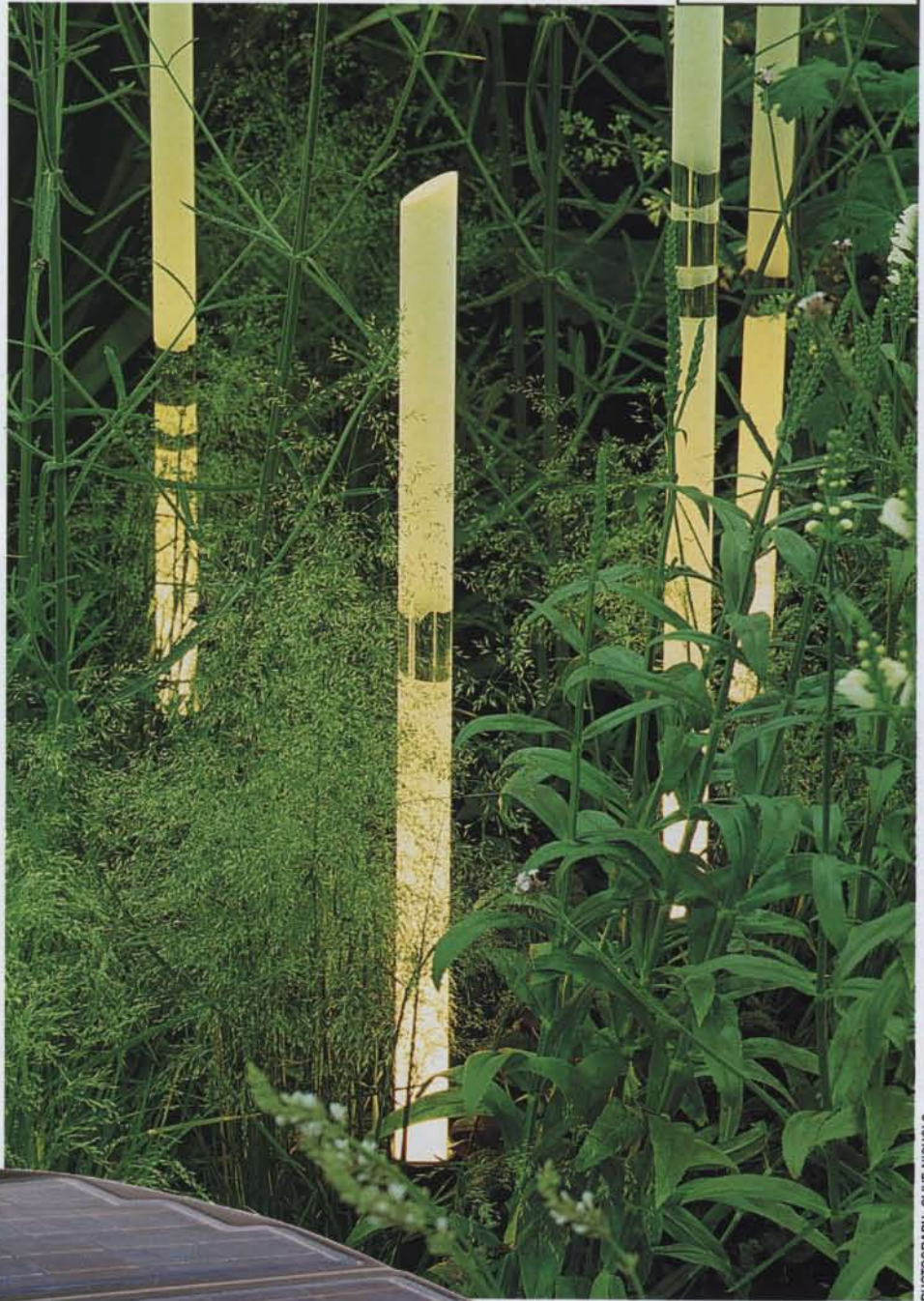
If you thought a lawn just needed to be laid, fed and aerated, dream on. The green gene in grass has just been discovered by the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Aberystwyth, and by next year, we'll be able to sow a lawn that stays green even if it's dying. Place your bets on an ebony black rose or tulip by the end of the year.



## High-tech horticulture

It's not just plants that have changed, but the way we treat them. No longer is it necessary to prune your roses at an outside bud – research shows that a quick once-over with the hedge trimmer gives better results. What's more, someone has even come up with a way to make mowing the lawn fun, if a bit pricey. The Wolf Cart XL, by Wolf Garden, is basically a 6hp go-cart with a grass box on the back and a mower slung underneath. At a top speed of 8mph, you won't win any races but it will make a good job of the lawn.

For those with less time, Husqvarna has produced a solar-powered, computerised mowing machine that roams around on its own – like an electronic goat nibbling at the grass – until the computer says the job's done. It's pricey – £1,446 – and takes ages, but at least you don't have to stick around. Electronic technology is everywhere these days, so be careful where you put your fork. Under the ground you'll find computer-controlled irrigation systems, plus cables for low-voltage lighting to beam up through trees or zoom in on intruders. Fibre optics is the name of the newest game from companies like Garden & Security Lighting in Horley. The light source is electricity and it's heat-free, so not only is it perfectly safe in the garden – and even under water – it doesn't scorch the leaves. →



PHOTOGRAPH: CLIVE NICHOLS



**ABOVE** Fibre-optic lighting – styled by Garden & Security Lighting for Hampton Court 1997 – won't scorch the lush leaves

**LEFT** The latest in solar-powered remote lawn mowing, £1,446, from Husqvarna (see the 1954 version on page 39)





It's no life for a bug, as the ladybird lands to sweep up aphids, black fly and all those little pests that stop your garden from growing

## Organic know-how

Organic gardening is all the rage and makes perfect sense as we become increasingly aware of the threat pesticides pose to the environment and our health. And the retail revolution hasn't taken long to catch on - I still marvel as the postman brings me supplies of slug-destroying nematodes (nature's own biological weaponry) pelleted chicken manure, concentrated seaweed and all the other organic paraphernalia like Enviromesh - the veg-warming du



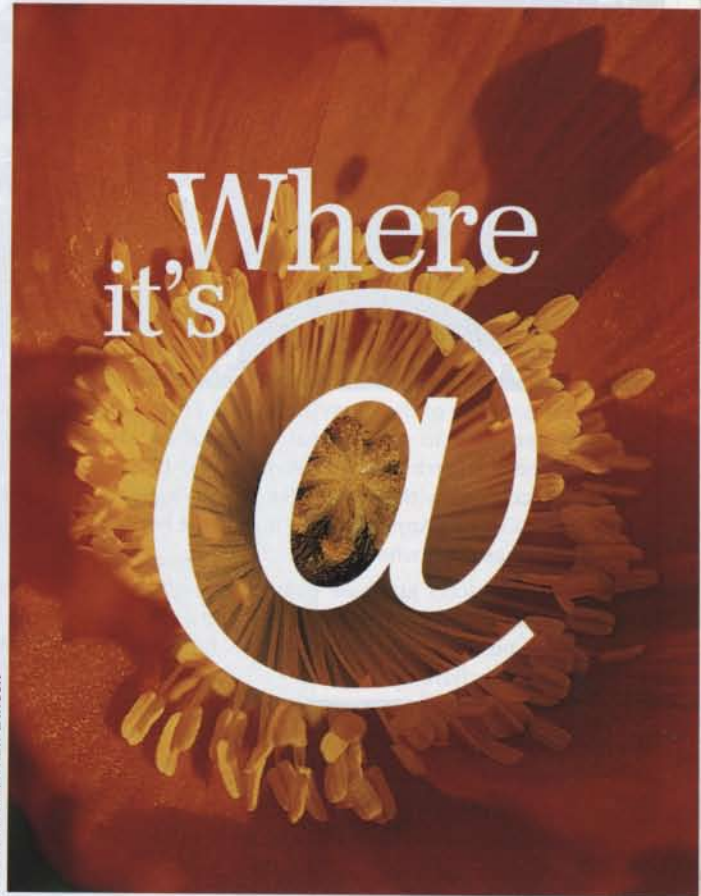
## Waste not, want not

Until a few years ago, few people had heard of coir – unless they had a mat in the hall. Now, of course, this useful by-product of coconuts is well known as a substitute for peat. Another waste product to crop up in garden centres recently is cocoa shells, which make an attractive chocolatey-looking alternative to traditional mulches. Not waste, but wonderfully useful for hanging baskets, are the tiny polymer granules like Swelgel and newcomer, Seramis, that absorb water and keep compost forever moist.

Now no longer to be treated as a doormat, coir matting has come into its own and has to be taken seriously. This sassy bunch from Threshold Floorings



PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW LAWSON



## Log-on 2000

Nothing to do with tree-trunks this time, but the Internet. Gardening has been towed over the information superhighway and logging on to the electronic maze gives you a choice of 69,712 websites to browse. You could, for instance, buy a rare orchid from a tiny nursery in Nowheresville, Minnesota, or learn about the finer points of holistic massage using medicinal herbs. One of the most useful sources of information is the Royal Horticultural Society's website – [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk). There are at least a dozen CD-Roms available, including Geoff Hamilton's 3D Garden Designer. Here you can choose from over 2,000 plants, landscape your garden then 'walk through' it and watch it grow over the next decade. ✨