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WEEKEND

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2005
THE
FEAR
AND
THE
REALITY

2005



THE YEAR IN THE GARDEN

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Just like every other year I can remember, 2005 kicked off with snowdrops, snowdrops and more snowdrops – not just in our gardens, but in the press. But fears of being trapped in some sort of gardening Groundhog Day evaporated when the new plant varieties started appearing in nurseries. Cone flowers from across the Atlantic caused a stir, particularly *Echinacea* ‘Art’s Pride’, an orangey apricot variety that is also scented. There are more on the way, too.

On the grass front, Knoll Gardens has an amazing new *Pennisetum* ‘Paul’s Giant’, with tall, fluffy flower spikes, and a variegated quaking grass, *Briza media* ‘Russells’, which is flushed pink in spring. Also hot out of the propagator is *Stipa arundinacea* ‘Golden Hue’, which gives a soft, yellow twist to this versatile plant. Then there are the curious restios – half-grass, half-rush, good for coastal gardens, pots and rooftops, and at home in the average garden.

In May, the Chelsea Flower Show had the media in a flap trying to pinpoint the latest trends and ignore

the fact that decking was still popular. The front runners turned out to be green flowers and foliage, as well as dark purple flowers (not necessarily new varieties). Sultry *Aquilegia* ‘Black Barlow’ and ‘Ruby Port’ were in half a dozen gardens, rubbing shoulders with deeply coloured bearded iris and the tulip ‘Queen of Night’. Although modern gardens were very much in evidence, I was glad to see a shift away from the “new materials”, with glass and shiny stainless steel hugely outnumbered by natural stone, timber and weathered copper. And we seem to have bid farewell to that violator of good taste, blue glass chipping mulch.

But late spring is not heralded by tulips and Chelsea alone. It’s also when publishers release their new crop of gardening books. Many were on the subject of container gardening (please, no more),

but standing out from the crowd was Christopher Lloyd’s *Succession Planting For Adventurous Gardeners*, which brilliantly explains how to cram as many plants as possible into a garden so that one appears as another fades. There were still more books on new perennial, prairie and naturalistic planting, and Pam Lewis’s *Sticky Wicket* quite rightly won the Garden Writers’ Guild Book of the Year Award, demonstrating that those styles of planting are now part of our gardening fabric.

There was a backlash in 2005, too. Remember shrubs? It seems we have all gone mad with perennials and forgotten to put in any structure planting. Even Piet Oudolf, patron saint of modern perennial planting, got a dent in his halo when the borders he designed at Wisley turned out unspectacular and hard to look after. But he was back on form with his borders at Trentham, the estate whose Italian garden Tom Stuart-Smith has so beautifully reworked.

Swimming ponds have been embraced by this country to the point where you can actually suggest installing one in a client’s garden without them looking at you as if you had just told them to dig a big

hole and bury all their money in it. Living green roofs are in as well. We are finally following other European countries, with architects putting them on to new buildings, albeit on a smaller scale; carpets of sedum are also appearing on sheds and garden buildings.

On the whole, gardeners are now allowed to be environmentally aware without having to knit our own wellies. We are growing more vegetables and being more organic and sustainable planting has become widespread, with councils planting roundabouts and wasteland with wild flower meadows mixed with exotic perennials.

Eight years after Alan Titchmarsh laid his first turf on Ground Force, the BBC banned makeover shows and in one fell swoop changed, and hopefully improved, the face of gardening on the telly. The word is that we’ll see more intelligent programmes to replace them.

But what about next year? My sources tell me roses are the next thing, and that the landscape sculptor Andy Goldsworthy will be at the RHS garden Harlow Carr, which is finally moving forward. That sounds unlikely, but I’m assured it’s true.



Clockwise from left: *Pennisetum* ‘Paul’s Giant’; Alan Titchmarsh, one time king of garden makeovers; the ubiquitous snowdrop; one of the increasingly common ‘living roofs’; and the tulip ‘Queen of Night’