



Published in 2018 by  
Laurence King Publishing  
361–373 City Road  
London EC1V 1LR  
United Kingdom  
T +44 20 7841 6900  
F +44 20 7841 6910  
enquiries@laurenceking.com  
www.laurenceking.com

Text © 2018 Abigail Willis  
Illustrations © 2018 Dave Hopkins

Abigail Willis has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the Author of this Work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 78627 316 1

Design: Rosa Nussbaum

Printed in China

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	5
<b>The Warden Case</b>	6
<b>The Lawnmower</b>	8
<b>Arts &amp; Crafts Gardens</b>	10
<b>Roses</b>	13
<b>Secateurs</b>	14
<b>Fairchild's Mule</b>	16
<b>Plant Hunters</b>	18
<b>Chemical Gardening</b>	20
<b>Organic Gardening</b>	22
<b>Garden Rooms</b>	24
<b>Herbaceous Borders</b>	26
<b>Mixed Borders</b>	28
<b>Island Beds</b>	30
<b>Allotments</b>	32
<b>Potagers</b>	35
<b>Container Gardening</b>	36
<b>Taxonomy and Nomenclature</b>	38
<b>Botanic Gardens</b>	40
<b>Hortus Conclusus</b>	42
<b>English Landscape Gardens</b>	44
<b>Wilderness Gardens</b>	46
<b>Prairie Planting</b>	48
<b>Zen Gardens</b>	50
<b>White Gardens</b>	52

# THE LAWNMOWER



**A VELVET-SMOOTH LAWN**  
*is the **HOLY GRAIL** for many gardeners,  
so it is fitting that the inspiration for the **FIRST**  
**LAWNMOWER** should have come from the  
**TEXTILE INDUSTRY.***



In 1830, Gloucestershire engineer Edwin Beard Budding was the man who spotted that a new-fangled cylinder cross-cutting machine used to trim the nap of woollen cloth could be adapted for grass-shaving duties.

Budding developed his design with John Ferrabee at the Phoenix Iron Works and a patent for their lawnmower, the world's first, was issued in August 1830, specifying 'a new combination and application of machinery for the purpose of cropping or shearing the vegetable surface of lawns, grass-plats and pleasure grounds'.

Prior to Budding's invention, what might be termed 'recreational grass' was kept in trim by grazing livestock or the scythe. Both options were a rich man's game; the former suitable for Capability Brown-style parkland in which attractive clusters of sheep or cows were part of the Arcadian fantasy, the latter requiring frequent mowing sessions by teams of scythe-wielding mowers. Adjusting the height of the cut was achieved by attaching wooden blocks to the mowers' shoes (a refinement not available, presumably, to the cows).

Made of cast iron, Budding's lawnmowers featured a rear roller and gear wheels but were heavy to use. They nonetheless found a ready market (Regent's Park Zoological Gardens and Oxford colleges were early customers), and when the patents were relaxed in the 1850s competitors were quick to market improved versions. Notable among these was the 'Silens Messor', manufactured by Thomas Green of Leeds. This light and easy-to-manoeuvre 'silent cutter' used a chain drive as opposed to Budding's gear drive, and was available in a range of mowing widths, the larger of which could be pulled by horse, pony or donkey. It was still being manufactured into the 1930s.

Steam, petrol and electric variants followed at intervals from the 1890s, and in 1965 the hovercraft-inspired Flymo came on the scene. More recently, the mower family has

been joined by propane- and solar-powered 'eco' models, but the die had long been cast: a neatly trimmed lawn was as achievable (and desirable) for the middling sorts as it was for the gentry, with lawns becoming a ubiquitous feature of the nineteenth-century suburban villa garden. Lawn-based pastimes such as croquet and tennis took off and, like the games themselves, the very activity of mowing was promoted as a healthful pursuit for both sexes.

In America, the desirability of 'grass mown into softness like velvet' was extolled by landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing, a pastoral vision continued by his protégés Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted. In the 1860s, Olmsted's design for the suburb of Riverside, Illinois, established the template for millions of subsequent American front lawns, with houses set back from the road and no fences to interrupt the grass apron between dwelling and highway. Somewhere along the line, tidy lawns became equated with moral rectitude; in the 'Levittown' suburban developments of the 1950s, strictly enforced covenants required residents to maintain their front lawns, their creator Abraham Levitt being of the view that 'a fine carpet of green grass stamps the inhabitants as good neighbors, as desirable citizens'.

# ARTS & CRAFTS GARDENS

**PROFUSION**, even **EXTRAVAGANCE** and **EXUBERANCE**,  
*within confines of the utmost LINEAR SEVERITY* –  
*Vita Sackville-West's description of her garden at Sissinghurst*  
*Castle encapsulates Arts and Crafts gardening.*



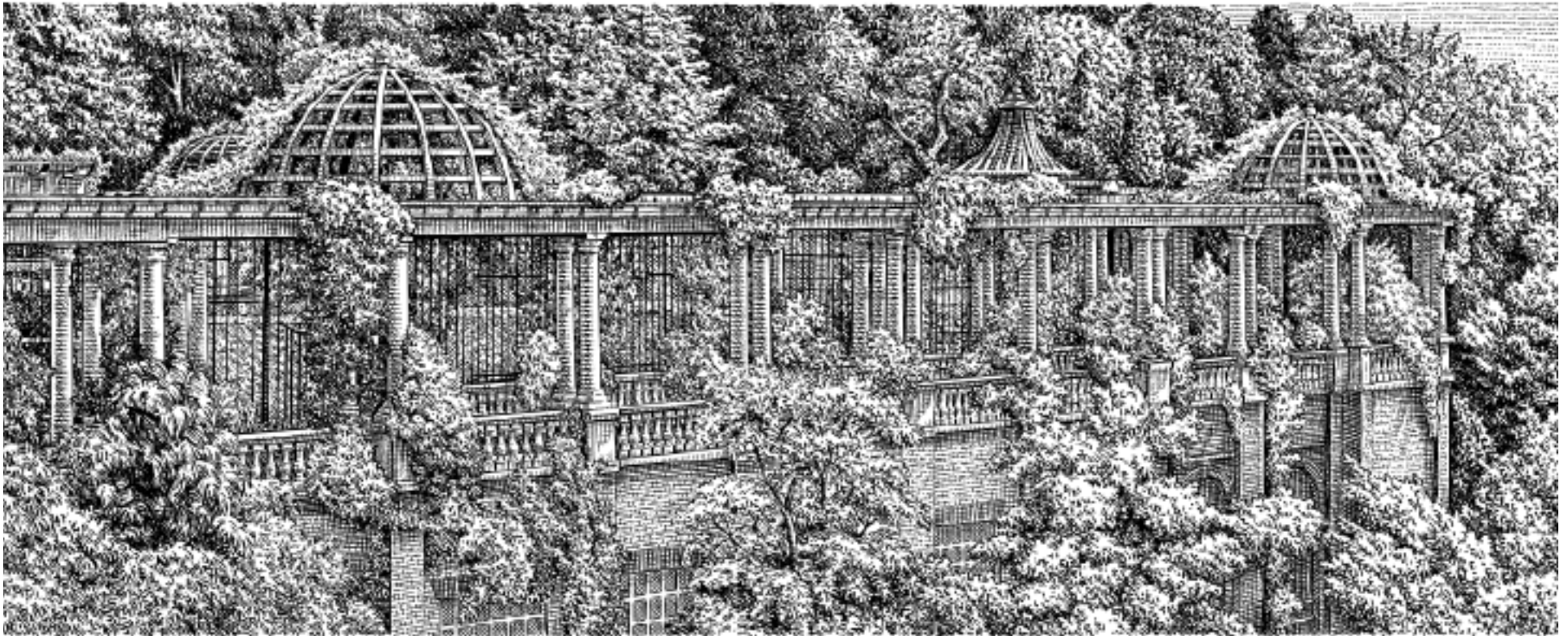
Arts and Crafts gardens were a reaction against the formality of High Victorian gardens, the style taking its name from the 1900 publication *The Art & Craft of Garden Making*, by Thomas Mawson. The style reached its apogee in creations such as Vita Sackville-West's Sissinghurst and Margery Fish's East Lambrook Manor.

Combining informal cottage planting with formal structure and a hint of faded Italian grandeur, the Arts and Crafts garden became the quintessential English garden style of the twentieth century, and retains its mass appeal in the twenty-first, despite its most

famous exemplars being attached to castles and manor houses.

Proponents of the style, Gertrude Jekyll, Vita Sackville-West and the doyenne of cottage plants, Margery Fish, all wrote persuasively about their own gardens, enthusing a wide audience through their books and journalism, and in Sackville-West's case, by opening Sissinghurst to the public at a shilling per head.

The relaxed approach to planting can trace its roots back to the combative Irish garden writer William Robinson, whose 1870 book *The Wild Garden* put the case for an





# ALLOTMENTS



*When the going gets tough, the **TOUGH GET GROWING**: cultivating food for personal consumption has always been one of the **MAIN MOTIVATIONS** behind having an **ALLOTMENT**.*

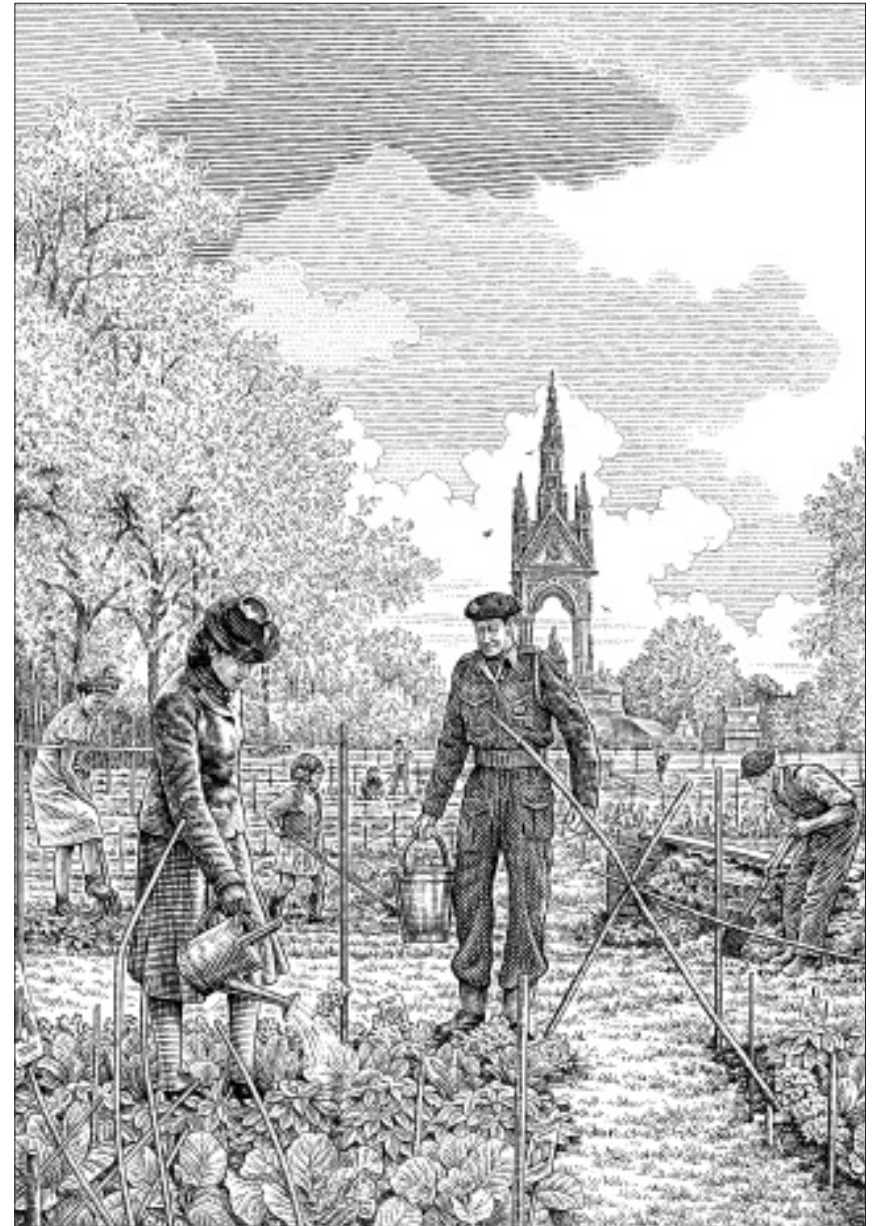
*Vegetable plots for **GARDENLESS GARDENERS** became commonplace as urbanization increased during the nineteenth century, and fulfilled an important role in **FOOD PRODUCTION** during the two world wars.*



During the heyday of the British allotment movement during the interwar period, over 1.5 million allotments were 'Dug for Victory' when shipping blockades disrupted food imports and rationing was imposed. Enthusiasm for cultivating a patch of rented land the size of a tennis court waned in the UK after World War II, but has increased sharply recently, following food-security scandals and environmental concerns. According to the National Allotment Society, there are

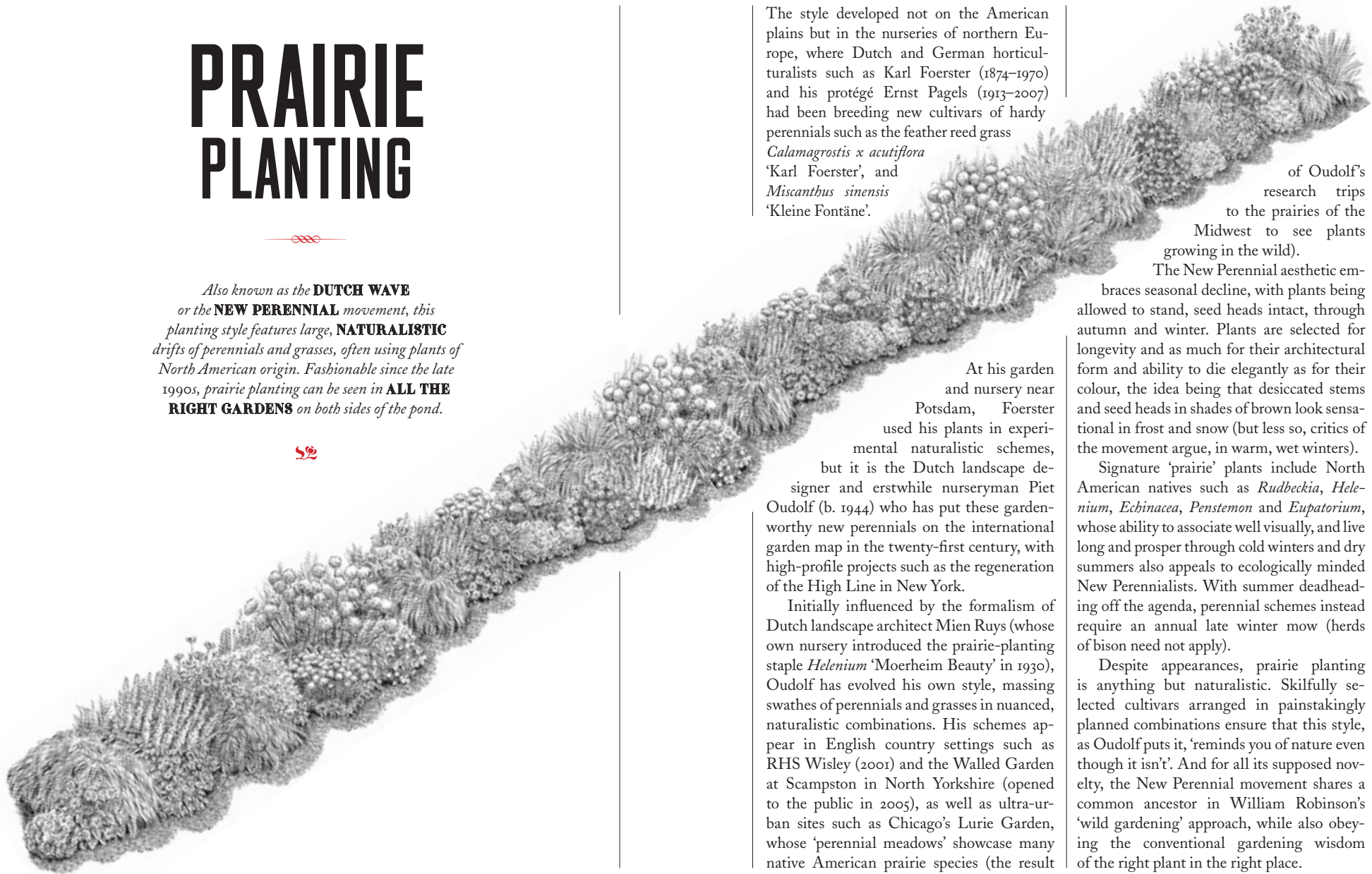
currently some 330,000 allotment plots in the UK, with around 100,000 people waiting to get their hands on one.

Intended for people with no access to a garden of their own, allotments began as a piecemeal, usually charitable, response to land Enclosure Acts that deprived the rural poor of access to common land from the seventeenth century onwards. The Industrial Revolution and mass migration of rural workers to towns and cities, and the crippling



# PRAIRIE PLANTING

Also known as the **DUTCH WAVE** or the **NEW PERENNIAL** movement, this planting style features large, **NATURALISTIC** drifts of perennials and grasses, often using plants of North American origin. Fashionable since the late 1990s, prairie planting can be seen in **ALL THE RIGHT GARDENS** on both sides of the pond.



The style developed not on the American plains but in the nurseries of northern Europe, where Dutch and German horticulturalists such as Karl Foerster (1874–1970) and his protégé Ernst Pagels (1913–2007) had been breeding new cultivars of hardy perennials such as the feather reed grass

*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’, and *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Kleine Fontäne’.

At his garden and nursery near Potsdam, Foerster used his plants in experimental naturalistic schemes, but it is the Dutch landscape designer and erstwhile nurseryman Piet Oudolf (b. 1944) who has put these garden-worthy new perennials on the international garden map in the twenty-first century, with high-profile projects such as the regeneration of the High Line in New York.

Initially influenced by the formalism of Dutch landscape architect Mien Ruys (whose own nursery introduced the prairie-planting staple *Helenium* ‘Moerheim Beauty’ in 1930), Oudolf has evolved his own style, massing swathes of perennials and grasses in nuanced, naturalistic combinations. His schemes appear in English country settings such as RHS Wisley (2001) and the Walled Garden at Scampston in North Yorkshire (opened to the public in 2005), as well as ultra-urban sites such as Chicago’s Lurie Garden, whose ‘perennial meadows’ showcase many native American prairie species (the result

of Oudolf’s research trips to the prairies of the Midwest to see plants growing in the wild).

The New Perennial aesthetic embraces seasonal decline, with plants being allowed to stand, seed heads intact, through autumn and winter. Plants are selected for longevity and as much for their architectural form and ability to die elegantly as for their colour, the idea being that desiccated stems and seed heads in shades of brown look sensational in frost and snow (but less so, critics of the movement argue, in warm, wet winters).

Signature ‘prairie’ plants include North American natives such as *Rudbeckia*, *Helenium*, *Echinacea*, *Penstemon* and *Eupatorium*, whose ability to associate well visually, and live long and prosper through cold winters and dry summers also appeals to ecologically minded New Perennialists. With summer deadheading off the agenda, perennial schemes instead require an annual late winter mow (herds of bison need not apply).

Despite appearances, prairie planting is anything but naturalistic. Skilfully selected cultivars arranged in painstakingly planned combinations ensure that this style, as Oudolf puts it, ‘reminds you of nature even though it isn’t’. And for all its supposed novelty, the New Perennial movement shares a common ancestor in William Robinson’s ‘wild gardening’ approach, while also obeying the conventional gardening wisdom of the right plant in the right place.

# THE ANTI-LAWN



*While books furnish a room, nothing quite sets off a garden like a lawn – even **MEDIEVAL MONKS** liked them, believing the colour green to be refreshing to the soul – and since the invention of the lawnmower, a patch of emerald greensward has become an essential in even the smallest garden. Few things equal the **SENSUOUS PLEASURE** of walking barefoot on closely shorn grass, either. But has the quintessential English lawn become too successful, having been exported to climates that are **UNSUITED TO ITS DEMANDS**?*



Turf grass needs water, a commodity usually in lamentably ready supply during the average northern-hemisphere summer but less so, say, during the recent four-year Californian drought. Watering is one of the chores attendant on a luscious lawn, along with the chemical weeding, feeding and pest control usually deemed necessary for grassy perfection. America's estimated 30 million acres of lawns use ten times more chemical pesticides per acre than agricultural land, and it has been mooted that turf grass is the US's biggest irrigated 'crop', soaking up 270 billion gallons of water weekly.

Monastic lawns may offer spiritual balm, but for the gardener the tyranny of the weekly mow and the seasonal round of scarification, aeration, sanding, reseeding and rolling can be less than edifying. The ecological toll of lawn care, too, has prompted a backlash. The doyenne of the natural landscaping movement in America, Lorrie Otto, blasted lawns as 'sheared, poisoned, monotonous, sterile landscapes' and advocated using native plants in their place. Her vision continues in the Wild Ones, a not-for-profit that has dedicated itself to 'healing the Earth, one yard at a time' since 1979.

Founded in 1997, Smaller American Lawns Today (SALT) also promotes native plants and suggests managing lawns as meadows as part of its mission to create 'more harmonious, productive, ecologically sound and naturalistic landscapes'. And in a sign that the anti-lawn might be going mainstream, the US Environmental Protection Agency now advises homeowners to use 'regionally appropriate' plants to create a 'water smart' landscape.

Another 1990s idea, the Freedom Lawn, is less prescriptive; its laissez-faire approach avoids irrigation and regular mowing, and encourages plants that would be usually classed as lawn weeds (clover, plantains, dandelions and chickweed) to self-seed among the grass. Another solution is to turn lawns into vegetable gardens, such as the first Edible Estate created by artist Fritz Haeg in Salina, Kansas, in 2005, and later in such locations across the globe as Rome, Istanbul and Budapest. The most radical alternative – artificial grass – is also gaining popularity as an environmentally friendly lawn alternative, although it is regarded in some quarters as the horticultural equivalent of vegetarian sausages.





# CARPET BEDDING



*The **ANTITHESIS** of **LOW-MAINTENANCE** gardening, carpet bedding provides colourful massed displays of, usually, tender plants, arranged to form complex patterns. A **LABOUR-INTENSIVE** approach, carpet bedding became **ALL THE RAGE** with Victorian gardeners.*



The term was coined around 1868 by the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, while the technique was pioneered at grand Victorian gardens such as Waddesdon Manor. It involves masses of plants, selected for their vividly coloured flowers or contrasting foliage, planted closely together to create an unbroken surface, and arranged in patterns, symbols or words. A linear variant, ribbon planting, uses contrasting bands of flowering plants to create flowing rivers of colour along a border's edge.

Perfectured by head gardeners at stately piles such as Cliveden, Waddesdon and

Craggside, carpet bedding schemes were a re-imagining of seventeenth-century parterres, and became a status symbol, requiring anything from 10,000 to 40,000 plants for a showy display. It was a very different aesthetic from the single exotic specimens displayed in reverential isolation by Georgian gardeners, or the naturalist 'wild' gardens advocated by William Robinson.

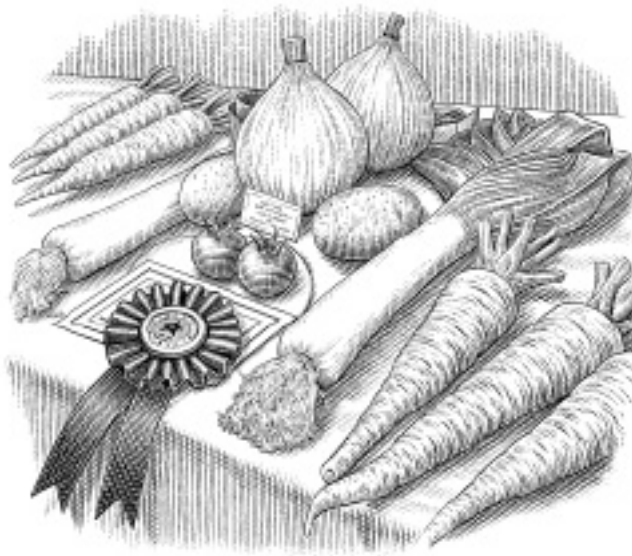
John Fleming, Cliveden's head gardener, is credited as the inventor of carpet bedding; he designed the box-edged parterre there in 1855. Some gardeners constructed mounded



# HORTICULTURAL SOCIETIES



*The first horticultural societies were set up by 'florists', **ENTHUSIASTS** who bred a small range of flowers for competition. Florists' societies were known in England from the seventeenth century, introduced (it is believed) by Flemish émigré weavers; the **ANCIENT SOCIETY OF YORK FLORISTS**, the world's oldest surviving horticultural society, was founded in 1768.*



Traditionally, florists focused their efforts on just six flowers – hyacinths, auriculas, polyanthus, ranunculus, carnations and tulips – but in the nineteenth century, this narrow repertoire expanded to include pinks, dahlias and chrysanthemums. The focus of sustained hybridization, florists' flowers evolved into distinct types, the ball-shaped English florists' tulips with their flamed and feathered markings, for example, becoming quite different from their Dutch relations.

Conviviality and competition were the twin pillars of the florists' societies, which held shows for each flower type from April through to August, starting with auriculas. With prizes and breeding deals to be won, rivalry was fierce, but shows were sociable events that were usually held in pubs and followed by a 'feast', a slap-up meal with alcohol very much on the menu. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Wakefield and North of England Tulip Society (England's last remaining specialist tulip society) exhibit their blooms in brown beer bottles.

The florists' zealous pursuit of progress (and love of a good flower show) was shared by professional horticulturalists. In 1804 Joseph Banks and William Forsyth were among the founder members of the Horticultural Society of London, which became the Royal Horticultural Society in 1861. The society's aim of improving the 'science, art and practice of horticulture' translated into sponsoring plant-hunting missions around the world, setting up professional exams for gardeners, and opening experimental gardens at Chiswick and Kensington.

RHS plant trials continue today at the regional gardens the society established throughout the twentieth century; many are held at its principal garden in Wisley (acquired in 1903), sometimes in conjunction with specialist groups such as the Sweet Pea Society. The RHS 'Award of Garden Merit'

was introduced in 1922 to denote particularly garden-worthy plants. Plants, and the nurseries that grow them, are put under further scrutiny at RHS flower shows, the most prestigious of which, the Chelsea Flower Show, began life as the 'Great Spring Show' in 1862, housed in a single tent.

With their aspirational show gardens and look-but-don't-touch floral displays, flower shows are the haute couture of horticulture. Nurseries debut their most promising new plants at flower shows – the poinsettia was first introduced to American gardeners at the inaugural Philadelphia Flower Show in 1829, while stalwarts such as *Geranium* 'Rozanne', *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve' and *Rosa* 'Iceberg' are some of the outstanding plants to have been introduced at Chelsea Flower Show since 1913. Flower shows have long been places to discover the latest design trends, with Chelsea's designer gardens prefiguring the rise of the rock garden and the repurposing of gardens as sociable 'outdoor rooms'.

At a regional level, local horticultural societies offer their members a programme of talks by guest speakers, garden visits, seed swaps and plant sales, often culminating in a hotly contested flower and produce show at the end of the summer.



# KNOT GARDENS AND PARTERRES



*A formal style of garden popular in the Tudor period, using low evergreen hedges to create **COMPLEX GEOMETRIC PATTERNS**, or 'knots'. These later developed into the **PARTERRES** and **BRODERIES** of Baroque gardens.*

Tudor knot gardens took their cue from the highly patterned decorative arts of the period, using plants to replicate the flowing, foliate designs of carpets, plasterwork, tapestry and textiles. One of the earliest known images of a knot garden appears in a woodcut illustration in an early printed book, the courtly romance *The Dream of Polyphilus*, published in 1499 in Venice.

Like living embroideries, Tudor knot gardens had intertwining hedges of fragrant evergreen herbs such as rosemary, germander or cotton lavender, which could be clipped where the intertwining rows met, to give the impression of one thread superimposed over another. Box was used, but not everyone appreciated its distinctive cat's wee odour – John Gerald, author of the sixteenth-century *Herball*, did not mince his words when he called it an 'evil and loathsome' plant.

Small, solidly planted, self-contained knots were said to be 'closed', while their

'open' counterparts were larger, with space for paths and contrasting areas of gravel, brick or coloured sand between the hedges. The original year-round garden feature, knot gardens were expressions of man's mastery over nature, designed to be viewed from above, from a terrace or an artificial mound, or the upper storey of a house.

As ever, royalty and the nobility set the fashion; Henry VII's palace at Richmond is known to have featured 'royal knots, alleys and herbed' in 1501. By 1577, books such as Thomas Hill's *The Gardener's Labyrinth* contained illustrations of knots for the less exalted to try at home. No original Tudor knots survive, but a revival of interest in historical garden styles in the 1980s led to some notable modern interpretations, such as those created by the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury, whose knot garden at Hatfield House featured a historically correct planting palette of clipped box, yew, holly, santolina, phillyrea and, unusually, hawthorn.

Open knots evolved into the extensive parterres first laid out in the seventeenth century at Baroque palaces such as Vaux le Vicomte and Versailles in France, and Het Loo in Holland. The ornate scrolling patterns of contemporary embroidery continued to provide inspiration for the designs – to the extent that such gardens were known as *parterre de broderie*. Clipped box hedges and flower-filled borders now provided the edging detail, with decorative motifs cut out of grassy plats, or *gazon coupé*, set against gravel areas for contrast.

Like knot gardens, parterres were intended to be seen from a high viewpoint, and were often accompanied by viewing terraces. Later, Capability Brown (the man responsible for sweeping away such old-fashioned formality) complained that it was only nursemaids tending their charges who benefited most from these aerial views.



# PARADISE GARDENS



*From its foundation in the seventh century, where **ISLAM** led, **GARDENS** followed. From **PERSIA** to the **MUGHAL EMPIRE**, from the **OTTOMAN EMPIRE** to North Africa, and from thence to Al-Andalus in Spain and on, in turn, to Mexico and California, the Islamic garden became one of the most **WIDESPREAD** and **INFLUENTIAL** garden types in the world.*



Its origins can be traced even further back in time, to the sixth-century BC palace of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, in modern Iran. Excavations here have revealed a formal enclosed garden divided by stone-lined water channels – the template, some believe, for the distinctive quadripartite gardens created by the region's subsequent Persian conquerors, in which the garden is divided into four equal quarters by water rills set perpendicular to each other.

The four-garden (*chahar bagh*) layout of the Persian garden, with its life-giving and purifying water, easeful pavilions and its abundant shade- and fruit-giving trees, chimed with the Quranic vision of Paradise as a garden, flowing with the four rivers of life (milk, honey, water and wine). Persian gardens became known as paradise gardens (the word 'paradise' deriving from the old Persian *pairidaēza*, 'a walled park'), and a love of gardens permeated the culture, from specialist

