



## Gardening for the time of your life....

by Andrew McIndoe, Managing Director & Chelsea designer, Hillier Nurseries

How you garden undoubtedly changes according to your time of life. The size of your plot, the amount of time you have, your level of knowledge and how much money you have to spend will all influence the type of garden you create. So will your interest in different plants; we all have our favourites and these change over the years.

### First Base



Your first garden is an exciting prospect, whether it is a patch of ground, a concrete yard or a balcony it offers the opportunity to grow, and if you have the slightest interest in plants, and a desire to garden, your imagination soon runs wild.

Influenced by childhood memories of the garden where you grew up you will probably want roses round the door, towering delphiniums in an herbaceous border, a productive vegetable garden, fruit trees and one of those wildflower meadows that look so inspiring in magazines. Of course this will all be on a budget

of £100 a year, and you will do it all yourself during one free weekend in April, after skiing and before you head to off to Ibiza for the summer.

In reality you want your First Base to be a garden that looks good, copes with neglect and is a place where you can entertain your friends on summer evenings. Simple surfaces using stone chippings, rather than having grass to cut give you free time to enjoy the outdoor space. Your awareness of the environment may encourage you to explore the use of recycled materials and containers. The productive aspect is probably best limited to a few pots of herbs to enable you to Jamie-up the barbecue. Evergreen foliage should be the basis of your planting scheme; this preserves your garden as a green space throughout the year, even if you allow your input to fall by the wayside. Silver foliage and light colours give an illusion of space, and simplicity is the secret of success: a limited plant palette well arranged.

Probably the next stage in your gardening life will be in a small garden surrounded by others. Perhaps a new build plot, with all the associated problems of soil compaction, debris in the ground and poor soil condition; or maybe an older overgrown garden that desperately needs rejuvenation. However, your main focus is getting your house up together.

### Surviving Suburbia



Surviving Suburbia is not the easiest age of gardening. You want privacy and your own little oasis; you want outdoor living, but without vast investment because the house comes first. You are not going to live here forever so you want results now, not in ten years time. Careful positioning of a light, airy tree or two and some fast growing screening shrubs will hide the neighbours and give you the bones of the garden to build upon. Ceanothus, pittosporum, griselinia and photinia are deservedly popular in this situation, but their potential is often wasted by confining them to a narrow border around the edge of the plot. Growing plants in containers overcomes poor soil conditions near to the house and it will enable you to take some of the garden with you when you move. Clever use of a stoneisland feature by organicstone rather than a square of boring paving slabs gives the garden some style and individuality.

## Coping with Kids



Your next garden may have to cope with the advent of children. You can approach this by keeping as large an area of grass as possible littered with unsightly play equipment. When the kids lose interest, often very quickly, you are left with large pieces of plastic and rusting tubular steel which are, not surprisingly, difficult to give away. Alternatively you can use your garden to introduce children to the wonderful world of plants and creatures that will make their home in a garden, if you give them the right conditions. This is the age of discovery. You can encourage wildlife by introducing nectar laden flowers and berry bearing shrubs. Water can be made safer with the introduction of a covered barrel pond or a pool under a decorative grill. Interesting aromatic plants such as rosemary, eucalyptus, lavender and mint bush provide a stimulating sensory experience. Clump-forming bamboos such as varieties of phyllostachys add movement and sound when stirred by the breeze. Their scale and vertical form are the perfect surroundings for the den – every child's ideal outdoor hideaway.

## Grand Designs



Your grand designs era allows you the freedom to indulge in your passion for plants. Now you have the space to garden on a larger scale planting trees, shrubs and perennials to your hearts content. The chances are you will have a variety of situations to work with in a large garden and you can grow plants that enjoy sun, those that need shade and you have the time and energy to cultivate those more demanding subjects like roses that need some regular attention. You do not have to be as selective about what you plant but you have to think about how you put the plants together and how they will mature. This could be the garden you work with for the longest period in your gardening life so you can plant for the future, but you still want it to satisfy the senses now.

Those making the transition from a small space to a large garden often find it difficult to adjust to the scale. You need to make planting areas large enough and go for big, bold features. You also need to move away from the edges and start using the space. Imagine you are in a ballroom. You are not just going to take tiny steps in a corner, you are going to cover the dance floor and get noticed!

## Losing the Plot



Eventually the garden you have created may require more energy and attention than you can put into it. Once you feel the garden is growing away from you and out of control it is time to take action. You either have to modify for lower maintenance, or move on and downsize. This is often seen very negatively, but it should not be like this. This is really the golden age of gardening. You have the knowledge, you have the time - all you need to do is choose wisely and be determined to make a fresh start. Design the garden of your life: one that will please you every time you open the curtains in the morning. Every plant must earn its keep and deliver more than one fleeting spell of interest. You may be losing the plot – but it is a very positive experience.

## Pushing Up the Daisies

The final stage in every gardener's life, alas, but can be a blooming tribute to a life well gardened!

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