



Weaving formal with floral

A small street profile belies the size of the garden – and meadow – that lies behind Orchard House, Suffolk, and the challenges the sloping site posed for its owners

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Photography: [Nicola Stocken / GAP](#)

Gillian and Geoffrey Bray moved to their Suffolk village home in 2007. The roughly half-acre plot consisted of four main areas: a large portion laid to grass, a small copse, a kitchen garden and a formal garden with ponds. There were some fruit trees and a venerable yew.

Their house, with its warm roof tiles and graceful chimneys, is Grade II listed. It was probably a wool merchant's house dating from the 15th century at the front, with several later additions at the back.

The garden is long, narrow and sloping, widening on the east side into a meadow around 900sq m (1,076sq yd) in size. Gillian says that many of the gardens nearby are similarly strangely shaped. 'Our meadow goes back to the town wall and runs behind three houses and their gardens. I suppose whenever that happened the owner of our house created an orchard there and named the house Orchard House.'

The couple (pictured) are no garden novices: they have created several gardens prior to this one. Gillian is the plantswoman and colourist in the partnership, with a leaning toward a blowsy, romantic, cottage-garden style. She likes order and a strong backbone for her planting. Geoffrey's hard-landscaping provides the perfect framework for her plant choices. As well as moving with plant favourites, they also take hard

landscaping materials that new owners declare they would not be using. 'When we learned that the buyer of our last home was going to get rid of the paths, paving and brickwork, we decided to bring it with us.'

In the first year the Brays worked on the overall design and started the hard landscaping. 'We are not professional designers, so our original ideas were amended as we went along,' says Gillian.

Taming the slope

Their main challenge was the garden's slope. To counter this they created a series of low terraces, starting with a formal paved area closest to the house. This leads on to a quadrant herb garden, carpeted with thyme and edged with hyssop, box and lavender. The terraces rise up from the curved, slightly sloping lower lawn to the summerhouse garden that features the 1930s revolving summerhouse, which Geoffrey's parents had when he was a small boy and the Brays have had in three gardens.

A long pergola (12 pillars in two rows) crosses the outer path and shades its own brick path, marking the transition between ornamental and productive parts of the garden. Its strong horizontal line masks the narrowness of the garden and makes the Pool Terrace above it secluded and private. Geoffrey used >>



The first of the terraces the Brays created to level their sloping site is a small herb garden just beyond the house. Low-growing thymes spread among the pavers, with white-flowered *Allium stipitatum* 'Mount Everest' and richly coloured, grey-leaved helianthemums in the foreground.

Orchard House

Location: Clare, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 8NP.

Size: about 0.2ha (½ acre).

Soil type: varies from loam to stony soil with clay and flints near the house.

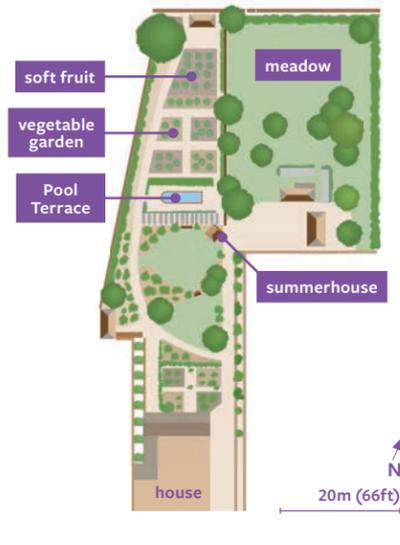
Summary: cottage-garden style with a solid underlying structure.

Key season: year-round.

Age: around 10 years.

Aspect: south-facing.

Not open to the public.



In the tranquil, formal Pool Terrace (above) *Allium hollandicum* ‘Purple Sensation’ contrasts with yellow-green *Euphorbia oblongata*. *Elaeagnus* ‘Quicksilver’ overhangs the wall and a pair of mophead *Malus trilobata* offer strong foliage blocks at height.



recycled bricks for the pillars of the pergola with green-oak beams imported from France. Gillian planted the brick pillars with roses, such as *Rosa* Claire Austin (‘Ausprior’) and Gertrude Jekyll (‘Ausbord’), *Clematis* ‘Guernsey Cream’, ‘Miss Bateman’ and ‘Madame Julia Correvon’, and climbers such as *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, *Vitis vinifera* ‘Purpurea’ and *Lonicera henryi* ‘Copper Beauty’.

Favourite place

Past the summerhouse lawn, which replaced three ponds, and the pergola is the Pool Terrace. This tranquil spot is one of Gillian’s favourite places in the garden. Here, far enough away from the road, she enjoys watching birds, dragonflies and bats spooling around the dark water surface.

Fan-trained plums ‘Victoria’ and ‘Czar’ form a wall of blossom and fruit, marking the start of the vegetable beds and soft fruit garden. Mainly in Geoffrey’s care, it is a traditional vegetable garden, but he is only enthusiastic about the crops he enjoys eating. So potatoes and onions are his pride, with Gillian nurturing salads and beans of all descriptions. If she had a free hand here, she would go for a more ornamental style of kitchen garden.

The immediate project ahead of the Brays is to downsize the fruit garden and decide what to do with the beds that will arise. This may give Gillian an opportunity for a parterre or cutting garden.

Establishing a meadow

Separated from the vegetable garden, and entered near a venerable mophead-shaped yew, is the meadow. The couple have planted a glade of silver birches and a handful of other ornamental trees.

They have restored from neglect some remnant

orchard trees, and have planted and trained new fruit trees along the boundary wall. Spring bulbs, ox-eye daisies and cornflowers are among the flowers that thrive in the grass of the meadow.

Geoffrey says he is hopeless at admiring individual plants in the garden, but ‘here, when the breeze ripples through the long grass and spring flowers, I enjoy this wonderful space’. Their grandson has appropriated the seat at the meadow’s far corner and, with Gillian, he created a green den in the woodland area, woven from living hazel.

The woodland below the meadow holds hazel, a walnut, oak and holly, and its reclamation from a rubbish- and flint-strewn surface is ongoing, but shrubs such as a range of colourful dogwoods and euonymus, together with ferns and hellebores, are taking hold and transforming it.

By taking it in stages, putting in a framework of paths and levels, removing debris, unearthing and stacking flints, renovating garden buildings, then planting, Gillian and Geoffrey have created a garden and meadow with multiseason interest that attracts wildlife. It is amazing what the couple have achieved in little more than 10 years. ○



The border along the wall on the east side of the kitchen garden (left) is the setting for late-summer colour from dahlias, hemerocallis and rudbeckia. At ground level *Dahlia* ‘David Howard’ and ubiquitous *Euphorbia oblongata* romp away, while honeysuckle *Lonicera x brownii* ‘Dropmore Scarlet’ echoes the heat of climbing *Rosa* ‘Phyllis Bide’ against the wall.

Creating a meadow can be challenging, but the Brays have achieved this (above) with aplomb. Here a path leads through daisies and grasses to the northeastern corner of the garden and a seat – a favoured spot for some members of the family.

From the kitchen garden, the view into the Pool Terrace (below left) is through a pergola-supported *Lonicera periclymenum* ‘Graham Thomas’ to *Rosa* ‘Phyllis Bide’ against the wall.

From the lower lawn, Orchard House (bottom) appears to be level with the garden when in fact it is further down the slope. This view is framed by *Acer negundo* ‘Elegans’ to the left and a mountain ash (*Sorbus pseudohupehensis* ‘Pink Pagoda’) on the right.