

A BLAZE OF blossoms

Crisp lawns, clipped box and flamboyant borders create a glorious union of formality and exuberance at Tinkers Green Farm in Essex

WORDS BY BARBARA SEGALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIANNE MAJERUS

THE DETAILS

STYLE

A mix of formality and exuberance in the borders and practicality and ornament in the potager, with a wildlife pond and hillside tree planting

SEASONS OF INTEREST

Year-round with emphasis on May to September

SIZE

Five acres

SOIL

Heavy clay improved over time, with spent mushroom compost, home-made compost, leaf mould and applications of blood, fish and bone meal



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP, Woven willow cloches protect young plants in Denny's highly productive kitchen garden; vibrant pink *Rosa odorata* 'Mutabilis' is a favourite, grown here alongside orange day lily 'Golden Chimes' OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A 'Tuscany Superb' rose sits among eryngiums, delphiniums, catmint 'Six Hills Giant' and astringias; the courtyard provides a tranquil place to sit

Denny and Peter Swete's garden packs a punch. The densely planted beds that now frame their thatched cottage on the Suffolk/Essex border are fizzing with annuals and perennials that ripple with high-octane colour. Roses, *Verbena bonariensis*, eryngiums, salvias, poppies, phlox, thalictrum and macleaya are among the June highlights, and behind these are well-placed containers holding cloud-pruned *Ilex crenata* and glaucous *Melianthus major*, plus new plants that garden designer Denny is trialling, such as grey-leaved *Senecio candicans* 'Angel Wings'. Some become regulars but if they fail to perform, they lose their space. The senecio, whose foliage attracts unwanted attention from pests, is already in the danger zone.

Denny has always loved shocking pink, white, blue and silver, but concedes that her colour choices have got hotter and hotter: "I've embraced orange with tithonia, kniphofia and geums, and I'm using hot reds and citrine yellows more and more. Christopher Lloyd introduced gardeners to new colours and fresh ways of looking at plants – I've learned not to worry about 'colour wheel' combinations."

Rural retirement was the plan when Denny and Peter moved to Tinkers Green Farm in 2003. At first, Denny was content with the generous one-acre plot that included a circular bed in front of their cottage and an old orchard, but she soon grew restless, wanting more



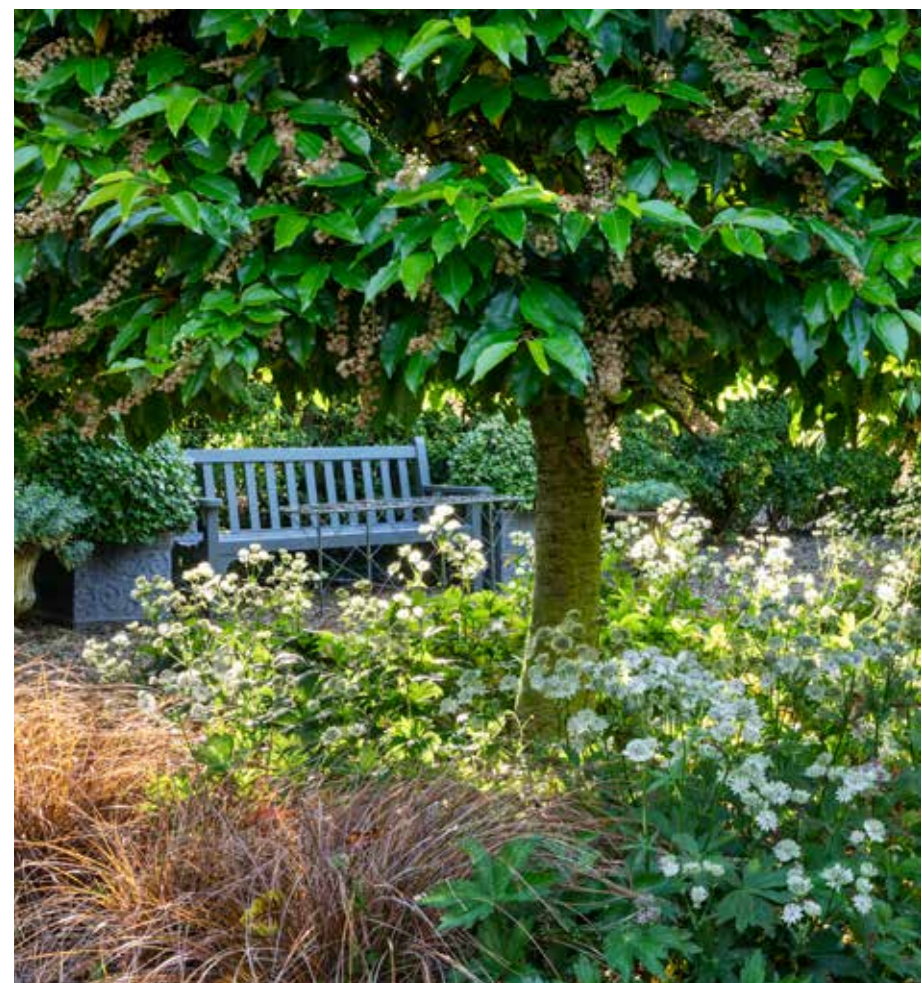
space. "I just cannot stop gardening," she says. "I love being outside in any season."

Fortunately, they were able to acquire more land from their neighbour, adding another four acres into which Denny could expand. Behind the cottage, she has created two long borders on either side of a lawn, and a longed-for ornamental kitchen garden: "I fell for these decades ago when I saw Rosemary Verey's at Barnsley House. I also met Joy Larkcom, whose book *Creative Vegetable Gardening* is inspirational."

Denny doesn't have a favourite time in the garden, caught as she is by the excitement of each season. "I am never bored, as each month brings new drama. Once the snowdrops, primroses and cowslips are up, there's no stopping the daily flow of plant 'reveals'. June does feel like the main stage performance, but there's a real firework explosion of colour in late summer, too."

Although not mirror images of each other, the two herbaceous borders behind the house do share some plants, with dazzling colour repeats of acid-green *Alchemilla mollis*, vibrant *Geranium psilostemon*, rich purple *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' and China rose *Rosa x odorata* 'Mutabilis'. These lead the eye down to a pair of stylish metal gates, punctuated by two metal obelisks dripping with the shocking-pink blooms of *Rosa* 'Sir Paul Smith'.

Beyond these is a small, unobtrusive swimming pool set into grass. By tiling its sides in grey, the Swetes have helped it look more ►





THIS PAGE, FROM TOP All is calm in 'Den's Den'; roses and fuchsias clothe the cottage wall, while pots of *Euphorbia myrsinites*, sedums and aeoniums are arranged around the terrace OPPOSITE In the kitchen garden, Rosa 'Veilchenblau' forms an archway and brown netting held up by clay pots atop bamboo canes provides attractive protection for kale and broccoli

like a rectangular pond than a pool. In the field and paddock beyond, Peter has planted trees, including oaks from acorns brought from their former garden and a columnar oak *Quercus robur* (Fastigiata Group) 'Koster', which was bought as a specimen tree.

Yew and box hedges are both important elements in this garden, but now, with the rising challenge of box blight, Denny would advise others to think twice about having box on any scale. "I have always said I'd move house if I got box blight. I do have it but I am not moving yet!" she says. Instead, she is battling it with TopBuxus XenTari and feeding them with TopBuxus Health Mix. Denny cuts and shapes the box herself, but usually has help half a day a week for heavier garden tasks and the rest of the hedging. Peter takes charge of the mowing, the trees and the pond, which is now a self-sufficient eco-system with many different water plants as well as frogs, dragonflies and birds coming to drink from it.

The kitchen garden is divided into eight beds where Denny grows a host of vegetables and soft fruit, with central features including an arch of thornless climbing Rosa 'Veilchenblau' and a mop-head standard stone pine, *Pinus pinea*. At one end is the greenhouse, where seeds and cuttings are raised, and 'Den's Den', her enviably neat shed. For height in the fruit beds, she has

standard-trained gooseberries – red 'Whinham's Industry' and green 'Invicta'. These make the fruit easier to harvest, even though they are still thorny.

Numerous flowering perennials, annuals and climbers add colour and ornament, and many of them are wildlife attractors, too – something Denny is passionate about. "I don't use any sprays to control pests, so pollinators and insect predators, including bees and ladybirds, are welcome." To deter pigeons, Denny uses brown netting supported on canes and held in place with clay pots. Smaller plants or seedlings are covered with bamboo cloches.

The link between house and kitchen garden is the Courtyard Garden, where Denny has opted for cool greens, creams and whites with a little maroon and black, provided by *Heuchera* 'Obsidian', *Anthriscus sylvestris* 'Ravenswing', *Clematis recta* and *Aeonium* 'Zwartkop' in summer. Portuguese laurels give height here, underplanted with astrantias and ornamental orange-brown sedge *Carex flagellifera*. As Denny says: "This is the part of the garden I see from the kitchen windows – it is shady and restful, and always entices me outside."

TINKERS GREEN FARM GARDEN, Great Sampford, Essex, is usually open by appointment only, or as part of St Nicholas Hospice's bi-annual Secret Garden Hunt. Contact dswete@justgardens.co.uk for details.



countryliving.com/uk



TIPS FROM *the farm*

- 1 Use metal stakes** as plant supports and keep them in place even when the plants have died back in winter. They mark their place so you aren't fooled into thinking you have space for planting newcomers.
- 2 Look closely at your garden** in all seasons. Tree and shrub shapes in winter are just as important as their leaf and flower colour in summer. Rosemary Verey's book, *The Garden in Winter*, taught me this lesson.
- 3 Keep it crisp** – if lawns are mown and edges sharp, the artistry of the planting will have even more of an uplift.
- 4 Recycle as much as you can**, including labels: I clean them off with wire wool.
- 5 Check out other gardens** for inspiration. I am on the Volunteer Garden Visits Committee at the Garden Museum (gardenmuseum.org.uk), so I'm frequently in other people's outdoor spaces.
- 6 Look out for plants** new to you in other gardens and find the right place for them in yours so they can shine. Two recent finds of mine are Rosa 'Astra Desmond' and Rosa 'Crown Princess Margareta'.