BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Creating a Garden for Drought

Jane Jordan





I will:

- Explain why I chose this design,
- Show some before and afters of the build,
- Talk about some of the plants I have used,
- Show how the garden has developed since 2019
- Run through some tips for gardening in a changing climate

The Beginning....

- 'A house with a dirt field'
- Site conditions
  - South facing
  - Open and unenclosed
  - Free-draining soil

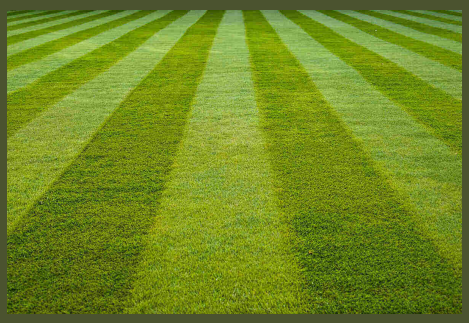


August 2018

- Google's description of the photo is "a house in a dirt field",
- As the house was one of a small group in a lightly-trafficked cul-de-sac, privacy screening wasn't needed, which meant we could keep the garden open.
- The soil was compacted, but when worked over, became looser - luckily, not much clay, but does have silty patches (proximity to the river).

Design Choices

Wanted something relatively low maintenance –





- Thinking about our wants and needs, there were several questions to consider, including how much maintenance we could manage in addition to the rear garden.
- The ‘easy’ choice would seem to be just grass it over – looks good, right?
- However, ‘easy’ depends on what kind of lawn vs what kind of life you want.
- According to Dr D.G. Hessayon, in his 101-page ‘Lawn Expert’ book from 1982, to maintain a decent lawn there are jobs to do every month of the year including dealing with up to:
    - 47 different weeds,
    - 8 pests (including bitches and bees)
    - 16 possible diseases (including ‘Take All’, ‘Necrotic Ring Spot’ and ‘Slime Mold’)
- So, the reality is somewhat different!

Conclusions

- No lawn - too demanding and hard to keep looking good.
- Instead, fill the space with plants that would like the conditions and be interesting throughout the year.
- Use a gravel mulch to reduce weeding and watering.



- Fortunately, what is good environmentally usually means good from a practical point of view. It is quite often cheaper too as you don't have to spend money on replacing plants or watering.
- So, no grass lawn. Apart from all the work is also, a monoculture which is not good for wildlife.
- Instead, I decided to fill the space with plants suited to the conditions.
- Strong, healthy plants with fewer bugs and diseases, need less watering/feeding and replacing.
- Mulching is key to preventing moisture loss, soil degradation and reducing weeds. Unlike bark mulch, gravel lasts years if you are careful with it. The mulch would also set off the plants.

The Design

- Symmetrical
- Balanced
- Brick edgings to define areas
- Raised beds to provide height - oak to tie in with porch
- Borders against house for climbers
- No solid fence or front hedge





- This is a computer model I did of the prospective design, which allowed me to 'try it on for size'.
- Front gardens need to set the house off as well as be welcoming to visitors – in cars and on foot.
- The starting point in design is always the house, and in this case the house is symmetrical with windows each side of a central front door.
- I opted for a symmetrical layout, using brick grid to break up the space and link back to the house, using Dutch pavers. The grid also provides a framework that helps to set off the planting.
- Raised beds constructed from oak link to the porch and provide height in an otherwise flat space.
- I added borders by the house for climbing plants.



It took a month to do the front. Main hard landscaping included:

- De-compacting and spreading the topsoil
- Laying the paths
- Building the raised beds
- Hiding the manhole covers



These show the development of the garden since 2019, from infancy to maturity

Year 4 – taken in August (so more grasses in evidence)
Year 5 – taken in June



I chose plants first that would like the conditions, and then by colour, form, shape and texture.

<u>Flower shapes:</u>

- Daisies – Echinacea purpureum Leucanthemum superbum ‘Real Glory’, Catananche
- Buttons – Santolinas, Scabious, Knautia macedonia
- Globes – Echinops, Alliums,
- Umbels – Dianthus, Verbena bonariensis, Achillea
- Spires – Agastache, Salvias, Sisyrinchum striaum, Lavender



Form and foliage

- Euphorbias
- Bergenia
- Ballota pseudodictamnus
- Yew cones
- Pinus mugo mops
- Grasses – Jarava itchu, Penisetum ‘Dark Desire’

Foliage

- Spiky – Eryngium (see holly),
- Blades – Irises, Sisyrinchums
- Leathery – Bergenias

Summer



Winter



- This is the garden in summer and winter, showing that it looks good all year.
- Form comes to the fore in winter but recedes in summer.
- Insects in summer, Lots of birds come in for the seedheads in winter.

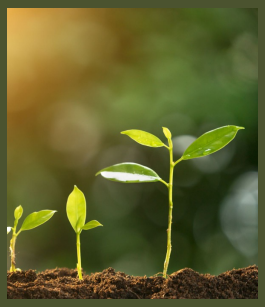


No slugs or snails (too hot/dry and scratchy).

Mainly aphids/white fly

Gardening in a changing climate

- "Right plant, right place" - plant a wide variety of trees, shrubs and perennials.
- "Plant right, at the right time" - plant in spring/autumn to reduce plant loss. Use Puddling technique in dry periods.
- Plant Small - smaller plants establish better and are more resilient.
- Minimise soil disturbance Practice greater tolerance of 'weeds', 'pests' and being 'untidy'.
- Save rainwater and reduce how much we water in summer.
- Improve drainage to reduce winter water-logging.
- May become windier - consider shelter and exposure, too.



We're predicted to have:
- Hotter, drier summers
- Wetter warmer winters
- More wind
- Less predictable weather

Need to make our gardens more resilient to extremes.

- Try to plan what you plant according to conditions and avoid garden centre impulses.
- Grow plants in ways that reduce the threat from weeds, pests and diseases.
- Choose plants well suited to the conditions and where possible have innate resistance to problems.
- Planting small is cheaper and the plants establish better
- Provide good drainage, mulch, and allow sufficient space for plants.

Puddling In



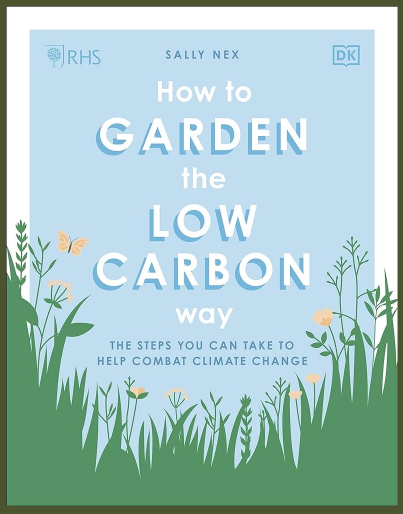


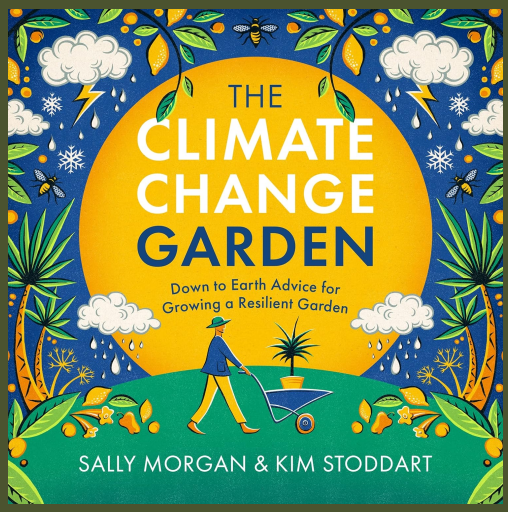
‘Puddling In’ – nothing to do with molten steel !

For planting in dry conditions:

- Dig hole and prepare for planting
- Dump a bucket of water into hole
- Plunge plant into water
- Backfill but don’t firm down

Some useful reading





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