

# BLOOMING SPECTACULAR

*Next week is Chelsea Flower Show – the world’s greatest gardening extravaganza. Our green-fingered columnist, Carrie McArdle, previews the best gardens, designers and nurseries exhibiting and seeks out this year’s newest plants and ‘must-have’ garden accessories*

Blue Delphiniums



**A**T LAST, IT’S HERE! Chelsea Flower Show. It kicks off the ‘Summer Season’ and since 1919 has been the most glamorous, most talked about, most inspiring gardening show on earth. A Chelsea Gold is the stuff of dreams and the most coveted prize for the world’s leading landscapers and nurserymen and a career-changing moment for aspiring newcomers. For you and me and the other 157,000 visitors over the six days of the show, it’s a chance to see the newest and best in design, meet our horticultural heroes and see up close the most beautiful and rarest plants in the world.

Despite one of the driest, hottest springs on record, this year promises to be a good one for Chelsea’s 30-plus gardens on show, with some of the biggest names in the design business taking part. The show’s sponsor, M&G Investments, has invited six-time Gold medal-winning Bunny Guinness to design its plot. A traditional kitchen garden for contemporary living, Bunny has raised beds with vegetables planted among roses and clematis, lavender and herbs for scent and tall pleached trees and fruit trees in pots for vertical height. At one end a glass deck and structure provides shelter for people and plants in its lower level with an open-air viewing space above.

Edible produce is also the theme of the B&Q Garden by Laurie Chetwood and Patrick Collins which, with its towering wall of window boxes, will be the tallest garden at Chelsea ever, designed to promote the sponsor’s new Vertical Grow Box and the ideas of urban greening and vertical gardening. The potting shed and greenhouse embrace sustainability with a thermal chimney, photovoltaic panels and a wind turbine, as well as composting and rain-water collection units.

Award-winning conservationist Marney Hall, known for her natural gardens with a strong environmental message, has also focused on sustainability with SKYShades Garden. Its hand-crafted wooden



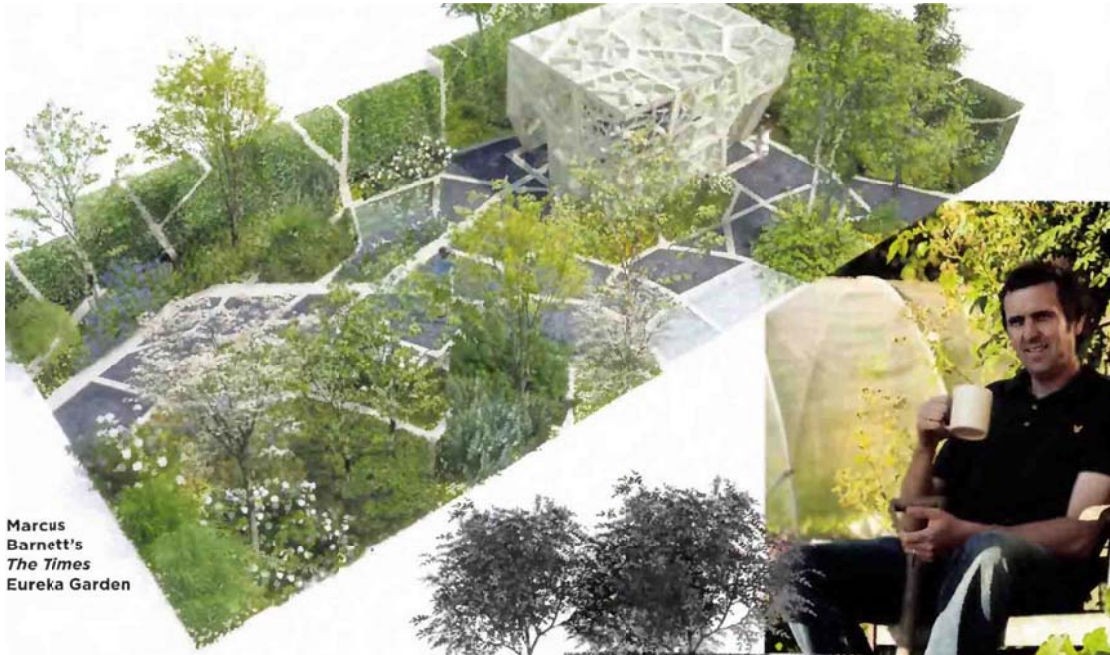
Marney Hall,  
the designer  
of SKYshades  
Garden (left)



*'It's a chance to see the newest and best in design and meet our horticultural heroes'*

The Cancer Research UK  
Garden by Robert Myers  
Above right:  
*Maianthemum*, aff.  
*flexuosum* by Crûg  
Farm Plants





**Marcus Barnett's**  
*The Times*  
**Eureka Garden**

home office is powered by the latest in photovoltaic energy, while the naturalistic setting is a wildlife haven with water and lush plantings of over 200 woodland, meadow and hedgerow species.

Nigel Dunnett's New Wild Garden for the Royal Bank of Canada is another that explores sustainability and naturalistic planting. All the materials here are recycled or waste products. The garden studio, with its habitat walls and green roof, was once a shipping container and the reflective pools are filled with captured rainwater. The relaxed planting is a contemporary interpretation of William Robinson's ideas that changed the way we gardened a century ago.

The Laurent-Perrier garden always draws a crowd and once again Luciano Giubbilei is the designer, with a calm, contemporary linear design that has beautiful *Parratia persica* trees and a distinctive colour-themed planting scheme in maroon, bronze and pink, a bamboo pavilion by Kengo Kuma (who recently won the competition to design the V&A Museum in Dundee) and sculptures by Peter Randall-Page.

Bold, contemporary gardens include those with a coastal theme by Robert Myers for Cancer Research UK and Thomas Hoblyn for Homebase, and Cleve West's sunken garden for *The Telegraph* that was inspired by Roman ruins in Libya with columns that are modern sculptural pieces.

The scientific and social use of plants underpins Marcus Barnett's Garden for *The Times*. There's a pavilion that celebrates the cellular structure of plants and many of those in the garden have medicinal uses. As do those in Ann-Marie Powell's striking design for the British Heart Foundation, whose Chelsea garden celebrates its 50th anniversary. With a distinctive central feature of red arches to represent the structure of the human heart, it has a dense matrix planting of heart-shaped plants and others used by scientists in treating cardiac disease.

Fifteen of the smaller show gardens fall into two categories: Artisan Gardens, which replace the Court-



**Left: Lands' End Across the Pond Garden by Adam Frost (above)**



**Ann-Marie Powell's striking design for the British Heart Foundation Garden**

yard Gardens of recent years and use natural, sustainable resourced materials in an artistic way, and the Urban Gardens with clever solutions for small spaces. Among these is the Lands' End Across The Pond Garden by Adam Frost, inspired by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The clothing company's head office is near Taliesin, the architect's famous Wisconsin summer home that's typical of his seamless art that blended nature with the built environment. Influenced by Wright's use of materials, Adam has introduced polished concrete pads across a pond, a wall of water and restrained architectural planting to create a tranquil city retreat.

Tranquillity is a theme too of the Artisan Garden, A Literary Garden by Martin Cook and Bonnie Davies. Inspired by Martin's work at Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden, Little Sparta, they have created a poet's hideaway with overgrown planting in cool



**Nigel Dunnett,**  
designer of the  
RBC New Wild  
Garden (far right)



**New Wild  
Garden, the  
show's first full-  
scale 'rain garden'**



**The B&Q Garden  
- it will be the  
tallest-ever  
garden at Chelsea**

shades of blue and white and stopping places for contemplation of the verses that are hand-carved into a sundial, benches and water features. And Kati Crome and Maggie Hughes's A Postcard from Wales, whose inspiration of the area near Dylan Thomas's hometown of Laugharne has resulted in a perfect holiday escape featuring a picturesque dilapidated boathouse and silted river creek and areas of wild and cultivated planting.

Of course, the heart of Chelsea's 11-acre show-ground is the Great Pavilion. I still miss the traditional old canvas marquee that flapped and dripped on stormy Chelsea days but once inside the Pavilion here's nothing to touch the colour, the scent, the magnificent blooms and specimens of shrubs, trees, fruit and vegetables on show, made more miraculous by the expertise needed to deal with this year's unusual spring weather.

The colour blue is big at Chelsea this year and the stand in the Pavilion with the bluest blooms of them all will be Blackmore and Langdon, the delphinium nursery and the only exhibitor to have been at every one of the shows in its 98-year history – winning more than 70 Gold medals. The Langdon brothers, the fourth generation of the family firm, will be on hand to advise on growing these summer show-toppers. Other family firms and long-standing Chelsea favourites are Bloms Bulbs for the most mouth-watering displays of tulips and Peter Beales roses and David Austin Roses, with their individual rose gardens where you can see and smell the scent of the roses before ordering for your garden.

Plantswoman and iris expert Claire Austin

◆ *Chelsea Flower Show runs from 23 to 28 May; 23 May, Press Day and Royal visit; 24 to 25 May, RHS members' tickets only; 26 to 28 May, RHS members' tickets and general public tickets*

◆ *Tickets are nearly sold out. Buy in advance at [www.theticketfactory.com/rhs/online](http://www.theticketfactory.com/rhs/online) or call: 0844-338 7505*

◆ *To join the RHS call 0845-130 4646.*

◆ *BBC TV coverage begins daily from 22 May*

(daughter of David) who won a Gold last year will be back with a bigger stand to showcase her stunning collection of peonies and to launch 13 new varieties of bearded iris. Also, always with an irresistible show of peonies and irises is Kelways, one of Britain's oldest nurseries, celebrating its 160th anniversary this year.

At the show for the first time and a magnet for plant collectors will be Crûg Farm Plants from Wales whose plant-hunting owners Sue and Bledwyn Wynne-Jones will be exhibiting some rare South American and Asian plants. And Stella and David Rankin of Kevock Garden Plants in Scotland will be showing for the first time their discoveries from plant expeditions to the Himalayas, Andes and Alps.

But Chelsea isn't just about looking at the best on show, it's also the place to buy anything from a show garden to a compost bin, from Japanese topiary scissors to the latest ride-on mower, a glass house, a contemporary garden studio or perhaps even a 'natural' garden swimming pool, as well as virtually every plant you can imagine from a packet of heritage seeds to an arboretum of rare trees.

Some of the stands I'll be seeking out for a little retail therapy will be Burgon & Ball for garden tools and accessories that make great presents – topiary shears in brightly painted pinks, green and blue, their allotment range of salad and herb vertical planters and a new range of tools including a compost scoop and potting sieve by Sophie Conran. Italian Terrace who supplies gorgeous, subtly coloured and frost-hardy terracotta pots – see them in Bunny Guinness's garden and then hotfoot it to their stand. The most stylish garden benches and tables at Gaze Burvill – they're contemporary-looking but also classics and for all things herby, Jekka's Herb Farm selling Jekka McVicar's range of seeds and books and launching her new loose-leaf herbal teas.

And at the end of the day? A glass of Pimm's or champagne in a deckchair by the Chelsea bandstand, dreaming of all those new ideas and plants that will soon be transforming the garden back home. ◆