



Isabelle Van Groeningen

The Seven Seasons

New Ideas for Your Garden All Year Round

With illustrations by Kathy Allnutt

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Neue Anregungen für den Garten rund ums Jahr)

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A tour of the garden year full of inspiration and expertise

Isabelle Van Groeningen grew up in Antwerp and studied Horticulture at the renowned Kew Botanic Gardens in London, followed by a PhD in garden history from the University of York. She has decades of experience working as a garden designer around the world. In 2008, she became the director of the Garden School at the Royal Garden Academy in Berlin-Dahlem, which she co-founded with Gabriella Pape that same year. On the [blog of the Royal Garden Academy](#), Van Groeningen publishes articles on all aspects of the world of gardening, which can also be read in English.



*»There is always a reason to try something new –
that's the best thing about gardening!«*



Even as a child, there was nothing Isabelle Van Groeningen loved more than digging in the soil with her hands and enjoying the greenery and the wonderful flowers. As an adult, she turned her passion into a profession and has since designed and planted countless gardens. Another matter close to her heart is imparting her knowledge about garden culture to others, nurturing their sense of colour, shape and scent.

In *The Seven Seasons* (because for gardeners there are more than just four) she shares her many years of experience and the knowledge she has gained. She explains issues of design and location, introduces not just the well-known but also numerous lesser-known of her favourite plants, and gives valuable tips on planting and care. And she reminds us of what is most important in gardening: the fact that a garden is good for the soul.

Internationally renowned garden designer Isabelle Van Groeningen takes us through the year and her garden and shares her experience.

Further reading & press material:

<https://gardencollage.com/wander/off-the-beaten-path/inside-berlins-konigliche-gartenakademie-a-nursery-cafe-and-design-studio-all-in-one/>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/3339340/A-world-of-inspiration.html>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/chelseafloowershow/3340541/With-head-and-heart.html>

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/eltham-palace-and-gardens/things-to-do/seasonal-garden-highlights/>

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Introduction

I am one of the lucky few who discovered their love for gardening in early childhood and turned this passion into a profession. My work never feels like work and the boundary between work and leisure is fluid. That's why I never think »Thank God it's Friday,« or »Oh no, Monday is rearing its ugly head again.« This certainly means that I work more than I should, but that has never bothered me.

But the joy of gardening, my love for plants, is no coincidence. Several people have made me the enthusiastic gardener I am today. My father was a passionate lover of plants. We had a large woodland garden just north of Antwerp in which we spent our weekends planting, pruning, weeding, sowing, composting and mowing lawns. We had everything: a large vegetable garden, fruit bushes, a greenhouse that mainly housed a large collection of cyclamen, herbaceous borders, and roses. All of this was nestled amidst the tall trees, with a growing collection of special trees, shrubs and shade-loving perennials and bulbs in between and underneath. We tried out everything, which wasn't a given since we were gardening on heathland. The acidic, very sandy, light grey soil had a pH-value of about 4.9 and nothing we did to augment it lasted long. This taught me the importance of nurturing your soil early on. We procured large quantities of compost, leaf mould and used trailer-loads of manure. This is where my love for shady woodland gardens and the many beautiful, delicate plants that grow in these spaces began.

As a passionate collector, my father was constantly searching for interesting and new plants. He ordered them from specialized nurseries all over Europe. I still remember the excitement when two huge wicker baskets with rhododendron arrived from Dietrich Hobbie, a rhododendron specialist near Hamburg. I recall how we picked up these extraordinary plants, which had been sewn into a large hessian cloth for protection, from the customs depot at the train station. What an impression that made! I must have been about five years old at the time.

A few years later we planted an entirely new garden area with trees and shrubs that we had ordered from Hillier Nurseries in Hampshire. We also regularly drove to Pieter and Rinus Zwijnenburg in Boskoop to buy rare shrubs. The irises came from Cayeux in France, and every year, flower bulbs were delivered from Peter Nijssen in Holland. Vast numbers of seeds for all sorts of obscure plants arrived each year from Chiltern Seeds, but for special types of vegetables my father went to see Peter Bauwens of De Nieuwe Tuin in Belgium. We often spent our holidays in Great Britain, visited gardens and nurseries and returned happy and satisfied with a carload of plants.

Not only did I inherit my father's love for plants and their enormous diversity, he also imparted on me his passion for their cultivation very early on. We spent many evenings taking cuttings, sowing seeds, pricking out and potting. Spring in our house always meant windowsills full of trays of seeds and seedlings competing for light. They had to be turned regularly to ensure even growth and, if possible, they were also supported by mirrors behind them. As a member of many specialist societies, my father participated in their annual seed swaps. He kept seeds from his extensive cyclamen collection, dried, cleaned and labelled them to then send them to the *Scottish Rock Garden Club*, the *Alpine Garden Society* or the *Cyclamen Society* in exchange for seeds of other plants.

The Kalmthout arboretum was only ten kilometres from our house. During my childhood, we visited it often and at all times of the year and as a student I was lucky enough to complete two internships there. This remarkable garden offers new highlights in any season. The internationally leading collection of magnificently fragrant *Hamamelis* (witch hazel) kicks off the year, followed by the early rhododendrons, then clouds of Japanese cherry blossoms, crabapples, wild roses, hydrangeas and many, many more. Our visits in autumn were as colourful as those in spring since the abundance of fruit and the vibrant autumn colours lit up the garden for many months. But it wasn't just the plant collection that was dear to me, there was also the unusual trio of people behind it: brothers Robert and Georges de Belder, who had bought the derelict 19th-century nursery in the fifties, as well as Robert's wife Jelena de Belder-Kovačič, a Slovenian botanist and gardener. The three set out to turn the old nursery into a nine-hectare arboretum and bought *Hemelrijk*, an estate of more than one hundred hectares in nearby Essen (Belgium), where they continued to grow their collections. Jelena was an extraordinary, warm-hearted woman with phenomenal plant knowledge, always surrounded by a swarm of people, plant experts and botanists, students or journalists from all over the world. The house and the unique botanic library were open to all. She talked fast, would start a sentence in Slovenian and switch to French, Dutch or English halfway through, so that you really had to focus in order to follow and often you'd only understand half of what she said. But it was worth it. She was exceptionally generous and liked to share her knowledge, her seeds and her cuttings. She knew exactly which plants were particularly suited to certain habitats, which nurseries one should visit, which specialists to turn to and how to prepare delicious meals from nature's gifts. She was curious about anything to do with plants. And thanks to Jelena, my path took me to England, to a year of training at the RHS garden in Wisley, followed by three years of studies at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in London.

The third person who had a lasting influence on my life is the German nurseryman and plant breeder Karl Foerster. During my time in Kew, I kept coming across his name. When I began my Masters Course in Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens at York University, I decided to write my thesis on this highly influential man. A first visit to his archive in 1991 and a meeting with his daughter Marianne Foerster not only resulted in a long friendship until her death but eventually to the founding of the Garden Academy as well.

I regret that I never got to meet this great man in person but I value so many of his ideas and principles. He could be ruthless when it came to his plants, throwing out previous strains when better ones followed. That's why many of the plants selected and named by him are no longer available for purchase. He advocated for the highest quality. A plant was not just supposed to flower beautifully and be healthy. Other qualities – longevity, the blossoms' optics after withering, winter hardiness – also played a big part in his breeding and selection programmes. He is particularly well-known for his strains of *Phlox* and *Delphiniums* as well as his concept of perennial gardens. It was his desire to keep gardens looking beautiful and interesting all year round, also in the depth of German winters.

Karl Foerster left behind many of his ideas and his knowledge in articles and books. Two of his most famous concepts are »Flowering never stops« and »The garden of the seven seasons,« which every gardener can appreciate right away.

Due to the mild climate in my garden in England, there wasn't a day of the year that didn't see at least two or three plants blossom, and my garden in Belgium also sported colourful flowers throughout the year.

Even in Berlin, where winters are usually proper winters with long periods of frost and icy temperatures, it is possible to plant a garden in such a way that it remains interesting to look at in this rather hostile season.

When conceptualising my gardens, the first thing I think about is which plants are appealing in the difficult winter months. If I only have space for two or three shrubs, they have to have something in store for the time between November and March, such as fruits, structure or colour.

Foerster's second basic principle of dividing the gardening year not into four but into seven seasons fits perfectly with the plants' rhythm. I am a colour enthusiast (some would call it fetishist), I love playing with it, trying out combinations, creating colourful harmonies and contrasts that match the respective season. I enjoy the changing light, the different shades that are unique to each season. And so my gardening year is in line with Foerster's division.

My father, Jelena and Karl Foerster have left their marks on my journey from my childhood in Belgium to England in 1983 and then to Berlin in 2008, where I was fortunate enough to establish the Royal Garden Academy in 2008 together with my life partner and soul mate Gabriella Pape, whom I met in 1986, when we were both students in Kew. It was our goal to create a centre for gardening culture as we imagined it. A place where the art of planting and creating gardens was at the top of the agenda. Between the familiar faces of lilac, hydrangea, *Phlox*, *Rudbeckia* and *Delphinium* I like to hide lesser-known plants that also deserve a spot in our gardens: everything from the humble *Claytonia sibirica* or the shy but very fragrant *Sarcococca hookeriana* to late-flowering *Heptacodium miconioides* or the reliable, drought-resistant *Baptisia*s. This makes gardening more interesting for plant lovers, but I also like to tempt gardeners to leave their comfort zone and venture further into the unknown worlds our wonderful plant kingdom has to offer.

The Garden Academy, which offers courses, garden consultations and design services as well as the nursery, is a place of learning, of joy and of information first and foremost. Jelena taught me to see plants in their entirety, to look at the broad spectrum of aspects that a plant possesses. Its botanical and horticultural qualities, its importance for the fauna and its culinary merits, too. I also learnt how wonderful and satisfying it is to share that knowledge with others.

It is rewarding to me when our visitors, no matter whether they took part in one of our courses, had us design their garden or used our gardening consulting services, leave with renewed enthusiasm looking forward to putting their newly acquired knowledge into action. That is the purpose of the Garden Academy.

I am so glad that I get to spend every day in this magical place, get to work with such an incredibly dedicated and enthusiastic team of people and have the opportunity to share so much beauty with so many people. Nature is not only a clever designer, it is also a good designer and creates the most astonishing objects. I discover new beauty every day. Be it the colours of the developing foliage of tulips or peonies, the unfurling leaf buds of a chestnut tree, the flower buds of *Inula hookeri*, velvety poppies, the turquoise berries of *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*, the radiant autumn colours of *Nyssa sylvatica* or simply the sensual, paper-like bark of birch trees. This profound joy, my years of experience and knowledge, but also concrete advice is what I want to share and pass on in this book.

Some of the texts were originally written for my weekly blog, which I have been publishing on the Garden Academy's website for the past five years, others I have written specifically for this book. I mainly address topics that keep coming up in conversations and

courses and that are on the minds of many garden lovers and hobby gardeners. But life with nature is so much more: imparting garden culture, nurturing the appreciation of colours, shapes and fragrances is a matter close to my heart and I would like to give everyone the opportunity to participate in this.



I. Early Spring: Late February to Late April

Rejuvenating Gardens

I have been interested in the subject of renewing gardens for quite some time, since many of them could do with some rejuvenation urgently. Every time I drive through my neighbourhood, I see old, tired and overgrown gardens. Have you taken a closer look at your garden lately, put it to an objective, critical analysis? We often don't notice how much the shrubs outside the window have grown so that little daylight comes into the house. That the trees and shrubs along the lawn edge have grown together to form an unidentifiable mass of vegetation. That it has become impossible to see where the lawn ends and the planting begins. Certain plants, which were once put in to form minor accents, to lend shape or colour, have become overbearing and big over time and now draw all the attention to them. Gardens have a cycle of ten to fifteen years. And it's worthwhile to keep this in mind in regard to the following aspects:

[...]

II. Spring: Late April to Early June

Dancing Aquilegias

As you by now know, I have a penchant for opportunists – for plants that have found a home in my garden and that find a new spot to grow and thrive year after year. I love the dynamics they bring to my garden. It will never look the same from one year to the next.

Aquilegias are essential to achieve this effect and over the years, they have become a kind of trademark of mine. It's rare that a planting plan leaves my desk that doesn't have an aquilegia here or there. They bring colour to the borders early and bridge the flower gap between the spring bulbs and the early summer perennials. It's not a plant that makes passers-by stop to look but their humble charm makes them very loveable. I am particularly fond of the larger, long-spurred varieties such as *Aquilegia chrysantha* 'Yellow Queen', as they float high above the still small perennials and bring a lot of movement and liveliness into a flower border. They always remind me of swallows swooping down towards the water.

That's why I'm appalled by the fact that downy mildew, a fungus, has now reached Europe and has been causing havoc in many gardens. It probably originated in Asia and affects the plants' foliage. Touchwood Plants, the British nursery that housed the National Collections of *Aquilegia*, was forced to shut down in 2018 and destroy all plants since this fungus had ruined the entire plant collections.

[...]

III. Early Summer: Early to Late June

Viburnum: A Must-Have in Every Garden

Some of our most appealing and valuable garden shrubs are to be found in this species, which can provide colour, structure and fragrance virtually all year round. Of all the plant species it is certainly one of the most diverse plant groups for our gardens, next to dogwood, hydrangeas and rhododendrons. We know of about two hundred different species of *Viburnum*, of which eighty are commercially available, not to mention the many cultivars. There are various evergreen and semi-evergreen varieties, though some of them can be damaged by frost during severe winters.

[...]

IV. Midsummer: Late June to Late August

Intoxicating Fragrances

What can be better than sitting outside on a mild summer's evening and enjoy the heavenly scents of all the flowers wafting through the air. And then there are also the typical smells of summer: freshly mown grass and the unique, indescribable smell of the first drops of rain on the pavement at the end of a hot day. Apart from the numerous roses, there are two definite classics that provide a fragrant sensation: *Phlox* and carnations. There are many varieties of carnations, but one of the ones I find most appealing is an old cream-coloured common pink, *Dianthus plumarius* 'Mrs Sinkins', with feathered petals typical for this charming species. Plant these and its other fragrant relatives in a sunny, open spot, at the edge of a supporting wall for example.

One grass also emanates an unexpected perfume: *Sporobolus heterolepis*. It is very dainty and delicate and must be plants in larger quantities so that its sweet, light fragrance can come into its own. I have a surprise for shady gardens: *Hosta plantaginea*. At first glance, this hosta with its relatively large green leaves may not be the most exciting representative of its species. But once August arrives, its pure white, slender, bell-shaped flowers appear and exude a delicious smell. The actual species is rarely available to buy, but *Hosta plantaginea* 'Grandiflora' and 'Royal Standard' are good alternatives!

[...]

V. Autumn: Late August to Early November

Perennials for Autumn: Asters & Co.

It is important to end the year with a bang. You shouldn't feel sad looking at your garden in September thinking that the gardening year is already over. When the season is in its last stage just before the start of winter, the large herbaceous border in the Garden Academy reaches its crescendo. Surrounded by *Sedum* and catnip, the border contains many clumps of asters. Grasses ensure volume and liveliness. Amongst all those main actors, there are some

other late perennials such as autumn ox-eye daisy, long-flowering *Kalimeris incisa* 'Madiva' and *Vernonia crinita* but also persistent summer heroes such as *Althea cannabina* with its small pink mallow blossoms and the tireless small-head sunflowers *Helianthus microcephalus* 'Lemon Queen'.

[...]

VI. Late Autumn: Early November to Early December

Right on Trend: Indoor Plants

The demand for indoor plants has grown rapidly in recent years. They have become a trendy accessory in living rooms, kitchens and even bathrooms. In offices, they are used to improve the work environment. In public spaces such as hospitals or the waiting rooms of doctors' surgeries, they are supposed to have a calming effect on patients. The idea isn't bad, but it often fails due to the maintenance and a lack of care. When someone feels responsible for them, has a feeling for them and takes good care, indoor plants can look good – but often they are just banished to a dark corner, die of thirst in front of a radiator, are watered too often or not enough. No one notices the brown leaves or pests and diseases. I feel sorry for these plants and I don't understand how people can just watch them wither away without intervening.

[...]

VII. Winter: Early December to Early February

Fascinating Seeds

The cool, wet weather isn't really doing much for my motivation to spend a lot of time in the garden. Instead, I am tempted to inspect my seeds. Before I allow myself the pleasure of scanning the list of various seed suppliers, I take stock of the different seeds I harvested over the past months. An assortment of small bowls, paper bags and envelopes has accumulated to be organized and sorted according to their sowing period.

Seeds may seem small and insignificant, but they are so valuable. They embody continuity, hope and abundance. Thanks to seeds, life can go on. Their existence means that food can be produced for the next season. For a gardener, it means that they can grow plants to sell and earn a living. That they can look forward to more of the wonderful flowers they have enjoyed in the previous season. For generous hobby gardeners it means that they can give and share something valuable.

[...]

Blog Post: Colour

14. February 2021 by Isabelle Van Groeningen. Find the full article [here](#).



Our landscape has been reduced to the colour of black and white for the first time in many years. The regular top up of snow ensures that any muddy traces of activity are erased overnight and everything looks pristine again by morning. The snow blanket conveniently hides imperfections, it hides the problem areas of your garden, yet it enhances previously unseen contours and shapes whilst muffling the world.

The satisfying crunch underfoot as you walk through crisp fresh snow is delicious. Though this pleasure soon leaves me on the treacherous, icy footpaths. I worry also about the well-being of many plants which do not like these low temperatures. A short cold spell is one thing, a prolonged period of hard frost can cause serious damage and possible loss.



Coming this late in winter (which according to the meteorologists ends in two weeks, if you go by the solstice, you must wait another 5 weeks) I feel cheated. Just at the point where things started happening in the garden, the show has been cancelled. Postponed. For how long? Too long to my liking, I worry spring will happen in a rush again as suddenly the temperatures shoot up and plants rush into growth.



Not only do I feel deprived of signs of life in my garden, I am hungry for colour. Any colour. All colours! I love them all. I find there is a place for each colour in the garden and consider myself fortunate to be able to create so many different combinations and permutations in all my planting schemes for other people. In my own shady garden, the colour green is the dominant one, as I have many great foliage plants such as Rodgersia, ferns, Hostas, Ariseama, Aruncus and Thalictrum. Most also bear flowers at some stage in the season, but I consider these as a bonus. For shade the colours tend to be soft. There is a lot of white, but also creamy yellows, soft pinks, pale blues and lilacs. I have come to really like the whites in my garden. They are more visible, and it brings peace, which I find incredibly valuable in this little green oasis, surrounded by so many neighbours, in the middle of a busy city.

Colour – White



White is a colour which is extremely popular. Only once have I had a client who specifically requested not to have any white flowers in his garden. There are many who only want white. Sissinghurst's famous white garden has given rise to many copies, few as successful as the original. Often white gardens appear bland and lack contrast. There is more to it than just putting together plants with a white flower. The art is to look out different shades of white and combine them with different shades of green. There is pure white, but there are also creamy whites, blueish or pinkish whites, or even greenish whites. As for foliage, there is the rich dark green of roses and peonies, silver artemisias, grey lambs ears, glaucous green of Irises and Centranthus ruber 'Albus' and pale green of aquilegias and violets.



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White is easy as there is a huge range of plants to choose from: of nearly every plant there is a genetically recessive white variant.

Colour – Blue



Everybody loves blue, everybody wants blue. The problem with blue, is that there are very few flowers that really are true blue, and those that are, are difficult. The number one diva in the garden world is Delphinium. If happy, they will put up a sensational flower display. In reality, they sulk in about 95% of gardens. The elusive blue Himalayan poppy, *Meconopsis betonicifolia*, combines the best of both worlds. The typical open poppy-shaped flower with petals made of the most delicate silky texture, carries a big boss of orange stamens in the middle in a clear sky blue. Perfection! It hates our climate, loves it in the north of Scotland and Scandinavia, where a winterly snow-blanket keeps the winter wet off, and summers are cool and moist. Then there are the Gentians. These too are fussy candidates I got to

know in my student days in the alpine yards of Kew and Wisley, and later in Jack Drake's nursery in the north of Scotland. I proudly planted *Gentiana asclepiadea* in my first garden. It sat there till my return from a holiday by the Tegernsee in Bavaria, where I discovered wild stands of this stunning Gentian on the Wallberg and saw what they should / could look like. Upon my return to England I dug up my poor, sad-looking plant and put it on the compost heap.



In the bearded irises there are some good blues, and there are a few salvias, though most of the true blues are not really hardy. Salvia uliginosa may just manage for those of you gardening in milder areas. I have just discovered Salvia azurea from Till Hoffmann, which I will be trying out. All the other blues, are not really blue and can clash badly with true blues as they have varying amounts of red mixed into them, giving them a lilac-purple hue.

Colour – Yellow



The most unpopular colour of all. Why? I do not know. So often I am asked to do a planting plan, but please no yellows. In some cases, I can convince the client to allow creamy colours, or the greenish yellows of Euphorbias and Ladies' Mantle, but for some, even those are too much. I can only imagine that it comes from a yellow overdose in late summer. Towards the end of July, into September there are a huge number of yellow-flowered compositae. Rudbeckia, Helenium, Helianthus, Correopsis to name but a few. Most of these have rich, warm buttery yellow colours that fit the hot summer days where the sky shimmers with heat. If not carefully proportioned, it is easy to overdose on these yellows. I always think of it as being served a huge piece of a very rich and sweet

chocolate cake. After the second spoonful the body strikes. It is a pity when people ban the colour from their garden, as it is an important one. On sunny days maybe less so, but on grey, dreary days a touch of yellow brings sunshine in the garden and lights it up.



It must not be much, nor must it be a rich, warm yellow, but it should be included. Look out for lemony, acid yellows such as Achillea 'Moonshine', Correopsis 'Moonbeam' and Helianthus 'Lemon Queen', and of course the wonderful chartreuse greenish yellows of Euphorbias and Alchemilla – these can be used to accompany any colour with great success.



Colour – Orange



Like with blue, orange is a colour which does not occur all that often in our palette of hardy flowers. For each season there a few orange blooms, but not enough to make a theme of it. Tulips, azaleas, Geum, roses, a few poppies, Crocosmia, Helenium and Chrysanthemum, though the latter two are usually more of a burnt coppery colour rather than a clear, clean orange.



If you decide to plant a border in hot colours, it is important to include orange tones. They provide a harmonizing connection between the otherwise very dominant yellows and reds.

Colour – Red



No colour is more powerful than red. The colour of blood, the colour of love. Red roses are bought as a symbol of love, not only for Valentine's day. Yet many shy away from the colour when it comes to their garden. I have always loved red and have very fond memories from my childhood garden reds. The by now rarely seen floribunda rose 'Cappa Magna' would flower profusely despite very poor soil and regular deer attacks and of course the gorgeous red poppies (subtle wild field poppies as well as the big, loud oriental ones). But I admit to having been a great colour snob when I first started doing planting plans over 30 years ago. I loved making cool colour schemes, blues, mauves, pinks. Until visiting Hidcote on a dreary, rainy summers' day. The Red Border, which on my first visit a few weeks earlier I barely registered, sang and danced and brought the whole soggy garden to life. I stood there looking at it, filled with joy, putting an end to my colour prejudice for good.



There are warm reds and cool reds, depending on which side of the spectrum they sit. The warmer tones veer towards yellow, and blend in well with oranges. If it goes in the direction of blue, its effect is cool and combines well with purples. Especially during the summer months, I love the warm coppery velvety shades of the numerous Heleniums, but also fierier Crocosmia. These add great structure.

[...]

I cannot talk about individual colours, without mention two people who inspired many gardeners with their colour artistry and taught me much about colours and how to use them. Nori and Sandra Pope moved from Canada to England in 1986 and spent 20 years crating the most fabulous colour borders at Hadspen in Somerset.



These great colourists used to crunch up petals before comparing them, to see what was the underlying colour of a flower. Then they would match them. Some flower combinations I personally would have never risked, really worked thanks to this technique. Their long border was a gradual evolution from creamy apricots, to orange, to bright red, effortlessly blending into virtual black-red colours. From there it would move into the purple blacks, gradually working its way down the scale into magenta pinks, softer pinks, finishing with salmon. At no point could you see where one colour changed to the next. This scheme was pulled through the entire season, choosing one plant available in many shades to string it all together. For the spring season they used tulips, then oriental poppies and irises, Hemerocallis and roses, in late summer dahlias. Upon entering the old walled garden, you were confronted by a double yellow border. Thanks to its use of fine, feathery light green fennel foliage, and mixing in lime and cream colours with just a few touches of blue, this retained a lightness throughout the season, seldom seen in such a mixture.

Colour is a very personal affair. It is important you follow your instinct, as you have to live with your garden, feel happy and comfortable in it. So please, do ignore all the good advice and opinions from well-meaning friends and journalists!

Recommended Books

- *Colour by Design; Sandra and Nori Pope, Conran Octopus 1998*
- *Gärten in Weiß, Gelb, Rot oder Blau; Sandra and Nori Pope, Callwey Verlag 1999*



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DR ISABELLE VAN GROENINGEN

Dr Isabelle Van Groeningen is a trained horticulturist and garden historian. Born in Belgium in 1965, she moved to the UK to study horticulture at the age of eighteen. Following a year's training at the RHS garden in Wisley, she moved to Kew to take the three-year Diploma in Horticulture course. Thereafter she worked three years for the National Trust's Gardens Advisers before moving to the University of York. Here she took the Masters Course in Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens under Peter Goodchild and gained her PhD on "The Development of Herbaceous Planting in Britain and Germany from the late 18th to early 20th Century".

Since 1992 she has worked in close partnership with Gabriella Pape, initially in the UK as Land Art Ltd, a Landscape Design and Conservation Consultancy and then relocating to Berlin to create a new centre for horticulture at the Royal Garden Academy.

As designers, they have built up a reputation for the creation of new design in historically sensitive settings. Bringing gardens and parks into the 21st century by adapting the design and planting to modern-day requirements and environmental constraints, whilst respecting the historical context of the site. With their botanical and horticultural backgrounds, they use plants to enhance spaces rather than rely on hard landscaping.



LAND ART LTD, OXFORDSHIRE - ENGLAND

1992 – 2007

The Landscape Design and Conservation Consultancy Land Art accomplished an impressive international selection of projects. This portfolio covers a broad range of schemes, from large commercial landscaping developments to private gardens and historical parks and gardens. Commissions have come from the National Trust, English Heritage, the Centre for Organic Gardening, private trusts, and individual owners.

Isabelle Van Groeningen and Gabriella Pape have been forerunners of environmentally sensitive design and planting, including projects for the Wildlife and Wetland Trust's site in London, and the Centre of Organic Gardening in Ryton. In 2000 they created the first organic show garden at the Hampton Court Flower Show, promoting sustainable gardening practices. In 2007 the company was dissolved in order to start the new project in Berlin. (See below)



ROYAL GARDEN ACADEMY, BERLIN – GERMANY (KÖNIGLICHE GARTENAKADEMIE)

2008 - present

After an intensive seven month restoration period of the historic greenhouses of the former Royal Gardeners Training Institute, Gabriella Pape and Dr Isabelle Van Groeningen opened the Royal Garden Academy: a modern centre for horticulture, based on traditional values. It includes a gardening school offering courses for amateur and professional gardeners and designers, a garden design studio, a garden centre selling a wide range of plants and accessories and a café. The Design Studio specialises in the design of private gardens and parks.



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

1999: Winner of English Heritage's Contemporary Gardens Competition for the redesign of Eltham Palace's historical Herbaceous Borders



Dr Isabelle Van Groeningen with His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales and the Chairman of English Heritage



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

2000: Hampton Court Flower Show: Winner of the Best in Show award and Gold Medal for the You Magazine's Go Organic Garden



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

2007: Chelsea Flower Show: Winner of a Silver Gilt Medal for The Daily Telegraph Garden



Left Gabriella Pape and Dr Isabelle Van Groeningen with the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall; Right with Her Royal Highness Queen Elisabeth II in their Chelsea show garden



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS:

2015: During the state visit to Berlin by Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II, Isabelle Van Groeningen and Gabriella Pape were invited by the German President Mr Joachim Gauck to attend the state banquet in recognition of their contribution to German-Anglo relations.



SELECTED UK PROJECTS:

Cliveden Manor – National Trust: Contemporary planting scheme for Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe's Secret Garden



Ryton Organic Garden – Centre for Organic Gardening: Geoff Hamilton Memorial Garden



Ryton Organic Garden – Centre for Organic Gardening: New themed gardens and entrance area surrounding the new Visitor Centre, administrative buildings and car park.



Hardwick Hall – National Trust: Redesign of large Herb Garden, sponsored by Ricola



picture: National Trust

Heveningham Hall – Private estate: New design concept for the Historical Walled Garden

Knightshayes Court– National Trust: Feasibility Study for the restoration of the Walled Kitchen Garden

Nymans – National Trust: Planting plans for new Rose Garden, Pinetum and June Borders



Waddesdon Manor – Rothschild Family and National Trust: Design new Rose Garden in collaboration with David Austin Roses

Walreddon Manor – Private estate: Creating a new safe garden environment for a young family within its historically sensitive setting.



Wardour Castle – Private estate: Integrating new housing project inside the historical walled garden



PUBLICATIONS

AS CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR:

- Terence Conran and Dan Pearson *The Essential Garden Book* Conran Octopus, 1998: Chapters on Essential Gardening Techniques and Plant Directory
- HDRA *Encyclopaedia of Organic Gardening* DK, 2001: Chapters on Woody Plants and Climbers, Herbaceous Plants
- Chicago Botanic Gardens *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002: Essays on Colour, Hidcote Manor Gardens, Perennials
- RHS *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* DK, Revised edition 2002: Chapter on Perennials
- RHS *Learn to Garden* DK, 2005: Chapters on 'Flowers and Foliage' and 'Trees and Shrubs'
- Spencer-Jones, Rae, Editor *1001 Gardens You Must See Before You Die*, Cassell Illustrated, 2007: Entries on 12 German gardens

AS CO-AUTHOR:

- Gabriella Pape & Isabelle Van Groeningen: *Praxisbuch Gartengestaltung* DK 2015
- Gabriella Pape & Isabelle Van Groeningen: *Gartenträume* DK 2018

AS AUTHOR:

- Isabelle Van Groeningen: *Die Sieben Jahreszeiten – Neue Anregungen für den Garten rund ums Jahr* Insel Verlag 2022

Berlin, March 2022



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SEASONAL GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS AT ELTHAM PALACE

A rare and fine example of an Arts and Crafts garden, with an intriguing mix of medieval features woven into the landscape. Highlights include the Sunken Rose Garden planted with scented hybrid musk roses, and the Rock Garden with a series of pools and cascades. Admire the stunning herbaceous border created by award-winning garden designer Isabelle Van Groenigen. Take a journey through a year of seasonal garden highlights at Eltham Palace and Gardens.

ELTHAM PALACE IN SPRING

Bulbs are one of the many stars of the show at Eltham from late winter into spring, and they are found in several areas of the garden.

In the garden rooms the wide borders under the Chinese privet trees are almost completely filled with drifts and clusters of hellebores, variously coloured pink, ivory and ruby, and intermingled with delicate epimediums.

FRAGRANT SCENTS FILL THE AIR

The air within the garden rooms is often heavy with scent on a calm spring day. Shrubs such as Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill' and the fragrant sweet box (*Sarcococca confusa*) fill the air with scent, enticing you to come closer.

Also worth a look are the soft pink flowers of the spring pea on top of the rock bank, which with some hellebores and Scilla give a flowery foreground to the Palace. The *Cyclamen coum* and primroses at the bottom of the bank are now quietly spreading over their bed of leaf mould.

You will know you are there from the delicate scents of the *Sarcococca*, dwarf evergreen bushes with shiny leaves and an elegant habit. They are tucked away at the back of the border; and their flowers are insubstantial and fading now, but it will soon be the turn of the camellias.

EARLY BULBS

Beyond the top of the moat areas are spangled with early bulbs such as cyclamen, snowdrops, yellow aconites, primroses, sky-blue wood anemones and wine-coloured hellebores

Within the Inner Court seasonal bedding schemes are planted in the terraced beds close to the palace, providing a great splash of colour with primulas, pansies and tulips in late spring.

ELTHAM PALACE IN SUMMER

One of the major features of the gardens at Eltham Palace is the long herbaceous border; which reaches its peak in late summer when it glows in rich purple, copper; yellow and blue flowers attracting butterflies and bees.

Designed by Isabelle Van Groenigen to establish a new garden in the dry south moat as part of the successful Contemporary Heritage Gardens scheme, it is one of a series of borders which encircle the medieval fortress.

It contains 18 different varieties of oriental poppy, 21 different varieties of peony and 20 different varieties of *Clematis*.

The border is 100 metres long and features traditional herbaceous plants such as delphinium with deep turquoise spires which contrast with the flat heads of *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty' and *Eupatorium atropurpureum*. *Geranium* 'Kashmir White' rises out of a sea of Nepeta 'Walkers Low'. All this colour is set off by huge architectural clumps of *Miscanthus*.

A GARDEN OF ROSES

Roses can be found in bloom at Eltham during summer in both the Rose Garden and the Rose Quadrant. Historic rose varieties include *Rosa* 'Gruss an Aachen' bred in Germany in 1909. Also excellent are the indispensable hybrid musk roses such as R. 'Felicia'

Along the top of the sunken wall of the Rose Garden is a lavender hedge which, with the roses, scents the garden throughout the summer.

From the Rose Garden visitors can walk through the delightful shady garden rooms, planted for winter interest but almost as varied in the summer; and emerge into the beautifully calm and light area following the bank of the moat to admire the bridge.

The shade provides ideal conditions for flowering shrubs such as the silvery blue lacecap hydrangeas (*Hydrangea aspera* Villosa Group) and almond-scented white flowers of *Eucryphia*.

WILDFLOWER MEADOWS

Leaving the moat area, a stairway can be taken to the top of the Rock Garden and then on to the medieval embankment to the south where mown grass pathways meander through a beautiful wildflower meadow beneath parkland trees.

Closer to the palace the dahlias in the summer bedding scheme will provide colour and interest right through to the autumn. Their vibrant blooms stand out against the dark green of the trees beyond.

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ELTHAM PALACE IN AUTUMN

Eltham Place provides a fiery farewell to summer with wonderful autumn colour provided by the trees, shrubs and herbaceous borders.

Prunus maackii, the Manchurian Cherry, with bark that glows orange, lines the drive to the car park. Flanking the coach park the colour changes to burgundian red of *Prunus sargentii* or Sargent's Cherry.

In the parkland *Liquidambar styraciflua* is the star; an elegant cone with deep scarlet leaves like widespread fingers held at an idiosyncratic angle. Nearby is an ornamental hawthorn, *Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia' with huge scarlet fruit shiny among the mat crimson leaves.

At the far end of the dry moat are several hybrids of *Rosa moyesii* which are tall hardy shrub roses festooned with fruit.

In the long herbaceous border asters and monkshoods are the remnants of the summer's spectacular display. These varieties are probably among the most rewarding of the genus to grow and include *Aster x frikartii* 'Monch' and *Aster* 'Little Carlow'.

The tall white daisy at the back of the border is *Leucanthemella serotina* which provides a contrast in flower shape and habit with the deep blue, poisonous monkshood or *Aconitum wilsonii* 'Barker's Variety'. The *Sedum*, asters, *Achillea* and *Veronicastrum* will keep their sculptural seed heads long into the autumn and winter.

ELTHAM PALACE IN WINTER

Traditional English summer plants are a well-known feature of Eltham Palace but winter is celebrated too. While the Garden Rooms are best in late spring with hellebores and epimediums carpeting the ground, the rooms are divided by shrubs which were rare in the 1930s.

These include the recently bred *Viburnumx burkwoodii*, grown for its richly scented flowers in winter and the strange, fiercely spiked Japanese Bitter Orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*), a novelty even today with hard green fruits that often persist through winter.

Elsewhere scent abounds with *Stachyurus praecox*, *Chimonanthus praecox*, *Viburnum farreri*, *Lonicera purpusii*, *Edgeworthia chrysantha*, *Mahonia* 'Charity' and many daphnes including the variegated *Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata'.

Hellebores emerge gradually and from December onwards their flowers unfold in a kaleidoscope of colours from creamy white through dusky pinks to wine dark reds and purples, echoed by *Cyclamen coum*.

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OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Inside Berlin's Königliche Gartenakademie: A Nursery, Café, and Design Studio All in One

By: **Garden Collage** | April 10, 2015

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Berlin's Royal Garden Academy is not your typical nursery: nestled in the heart of Berlin, the Academy is a cross between a nursery, a café, a design studio, and a gardening school that attracts foodie aesthetes and nature-lovers alike. Königliche Gartenakademie has a gorgeous glass facade that looks like a cross between a greenhouse and Copenhagen's famed Torvehallerne Market, with gathering spaces for a variety of activities that make it a top "green" destination in central Europe.

Garden Collage spoke with Gartenakademie co-Founders Gabriella Pape and Isabelle Van Groeningen about the inspiration behind the project. Below, they discuss the legacy of the German garden they've designed for the Academy and the annual Japanese Garden Exhibit that's currently on display through May 15.

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