



RHS

DESIGN OUTDOORS

Projects and
plans for
a stylish
garden

Matt Keightley

Photography by
Marianne Majerus



CASE STUDY

A Wildlife Garden

JANE BROCKBANK

It is difficult to believe that this garden, with its natural swimming pond and wildlife meadow, is only a few miles from the centre of London, and that it was only created relatively recently. The brief to the designer, Jane Brockbank, was to create an informal garden that all the family could enjoy and that is also good for wildlife. Although the garden was originally quite overgrown and required work, it had a superb position backing onto a park containing lots of trees, providing a natural screen. The plot's other distinct advantage was that an extension was added to the house at the same time as the garden was created, which meant that the floor could be laid so the interior flowed seamlessly outdoors.

The eating area is separated from the poolside terrace by a timber raised bed that brims with mono planting of grasses that look sculptural all year round. The same timber is used for the boardwalk that leads across the shallow margins at one end of the swimming pond. A large Kadai firepit is popular with the older teenagers, while there's also an athletic field, trampoline, swings, table-tennis table and three-room treehouse to keep the other children entertained. The treehouse is made from a mixture of new and reclaimed wood, and fixed to a mature willow, so the large weeping branches soften its edges. The wildflower meadow works both to frame the play areas and to mirror the natural plantings at the edges of the swimming pond.

Right: The sunny garden has heavy clay soil. The mixed planting thus includes clay-tolerant perennials such as *Ceranium Rozanne*, *Libertia grandiflora*, *Cirsium rivulare* and *Aconitum 'Ivorine'*. The pond can be heated to extend the swimming season.





CASE STUDY

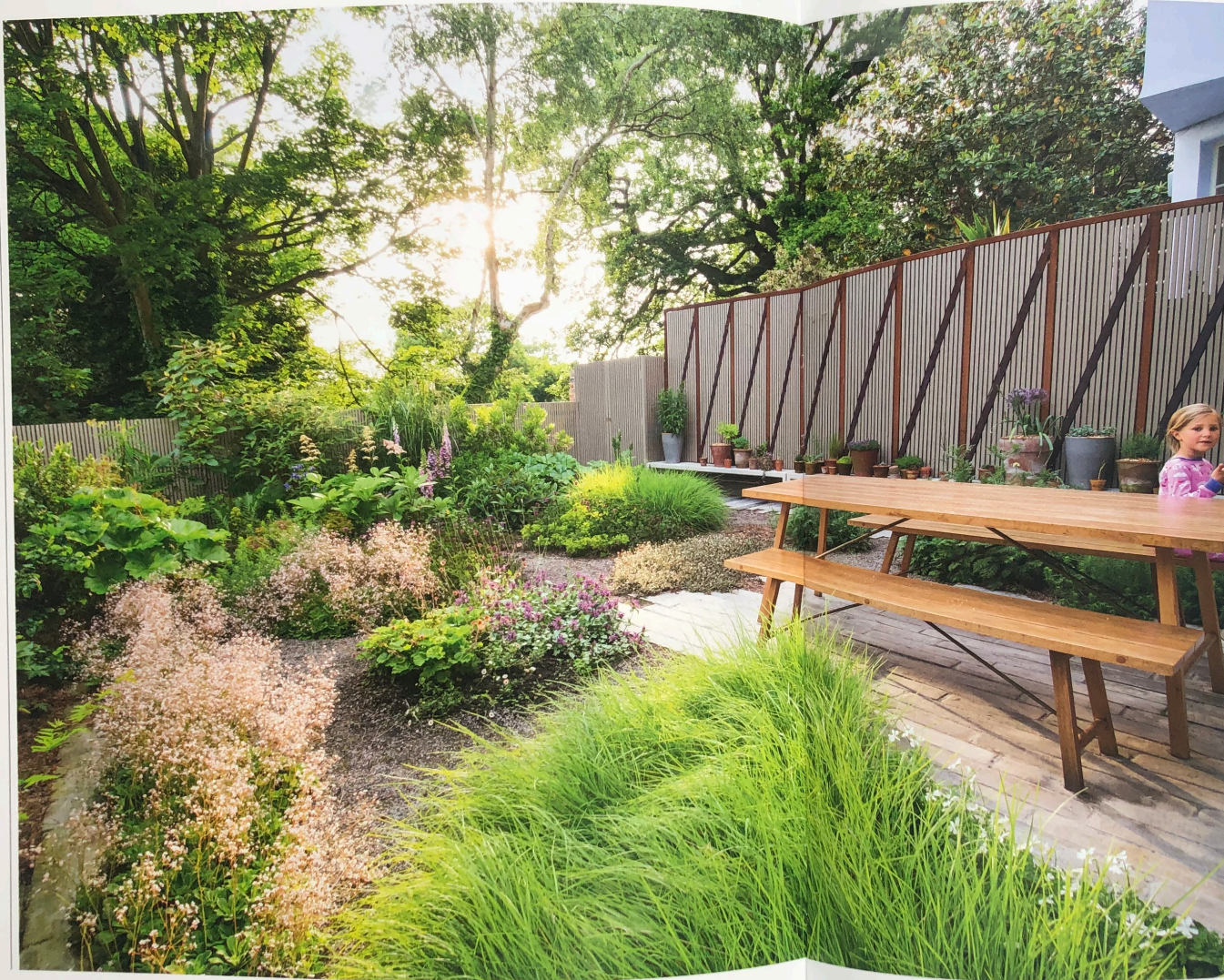
Contemporary Relaxed

JANE BROCKBANK

This garden needed to satisfy a range of requirements. First, it had to complement the newly built traditional-style town house. Second, it had to create the feeling of a contemporary but informal English country garden and, while balancing both those requirements, it also had to provide somewhere for children to play. The original garden had a swimming pool, fountains and, unfortunately, a heavy *X Cuprocypris leylandii* (Leyland cypress), as well as four out-of-fashion mature poplars. The space looked exhausted and uninspiring. At 35 x 25m (115 x 82ft) it was, however, a good size. The local council allowed the designer, Jane Brockbank, to take out the cypress, but the poplars had to stay. The swimming pool and fountains went, too.

The design of the new garden blends luxuriant plantings in generous beds with a large lawn, both of which can be seen from the terrace. The fire bowl provides both sculptural interest and warmth on cool evenings, while the four *Sorbus commixta* (Japanese rowan) define the space and restrict the visual impact of the new-build house behind. The whole design is set on a central axis: the gravel path that leads from the terrace to the lawn. Loose plantings of perennials tumble over its edge. In spring, the key colours are blues. In midsummer, the palette moves to pinks. Three fastigiate box columns in each of the two asymmetrical beds provide winter structure. Hidden paths curve through the flower beds, which are fun for children to run through and ideal for maintenance. Lastly, there is a playhouse and climbing frame.

Left: The Japanese rowans, with their filigree canopy, soften the brickwork of the house. In the centre of the terrace sits a sculptural fire bowl. From the terrace, the adults can watch the children on the lawn beyond the flowerbeds.



CASE STUDY

Texture and Form

JANE BROCKBANK

The owner of this garden, John Smart of John Smart Architects, had already put up the distinctive steel and rusted steel timber screen that forms one boundary wall when he brought in garden designer Jane Brockbank to collaborate on creating a garden. As an architect he was interested in texture and form, and in using these to inform both the hard landscaping and the planting. The end result is a design that is strikingly contemporary and yet filled with delicate planting. Outside the house, slim silver birches screen the road with their lacy foliage and provide the focus for a verdant woodland understorey. This sits against the patterned background of the scalloped terracotta wall tiles, which were saved from the old coach house that previously stood on the site. The paths and paving throughout are made from Danish brick in slightly different sizes and varying tones of grey to give a naturalistic feel. In the back garden, the oak table and benches stand on an island of grey brick surrounded by a sea of gravel into which are sown drifts of perennials and grasses. The scheme is mainly greens with hummocks of *Sedelia autumnalis* (autumn moor-grass) and highlights of purples and pinks from *Digitalis* (foxgloves), *rodgersia* and low-growing *Lamium* (dead nettle) and *Trifolium* (clover). In the front garden, the theme continues with rivers of *Luzula nivea* (snow rush) either side of the path and alternately planted *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae* and the froth of the pink cow parsley, *Cbaerephyllum hirsutum* 'Roseum'.

Left: The owner wanted a planting scheme that focused on texture, form and pattern rather than colour. Jane Brockbank's planting of softly textured grasses and perennials in the island beds complements the more formal lines of the hard landscaping.