



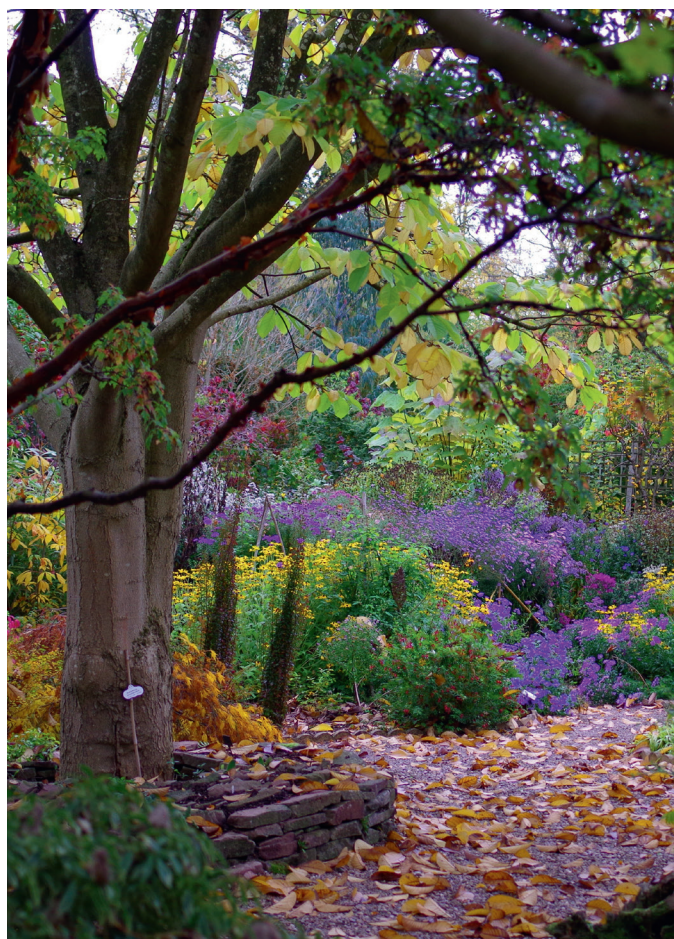
# The last hurrah

As the seasons change, designers give techniques and tips on planting and structure to ensure schemes remain interesting and inviting through autumn and beyond

## I. Modern romance

Garden Designer Tom Stuart-Smith employs a range of design techniques that permit good garden views throughout the year. In autumn, the planting matrix is deliberately reduced. Pared back to soft bones, the RHS Garden Wisley reveals a strong, bold and simple design that makes use of the season's best qualities: backlighting and movement. Repeat positioning of upright, crisply clipped beech blocks draws the eye through a contrastingly soft, swishing sea of tousled light-catching grasses. Working with 'a detailed understanding of the nature of a place', Tom's design complements the golden framework afforded by the more naturalistic arrangement of mature and existing trees. 'Our work has a richness of form and texture that belies the economy of means by which this is achieved.' →

FEATURE: JACKY HUBBES/PHOTOGRAPH (1) MARIANNE MAJERUS



## 2. True colours

Nursery owners and designers Helen Picton and Ross Barbour, Old Court Nurseries, are masters of autumn garden design, illuminating dappled shade with jolts of dazzling colour. Specialist growers of Michaelmas daisies, their garden is mounded with flowering cushions of aster of every size and shade: white, pink, blue and radiant purple. These join gold-topped, late-flowering rudbeckia, which radiate beneath a canopy of coloured foliage trees and shrubs: golden *Magnolia dawsoniana*, *Rhus typhina* 'Tiger Eyes', jewel-red *Prunus sargentii*. Sheaths of light-catching, ragged bark peel away from the trunk of the paperbark maple, *Acer griseum*, adding another visual dimension. 'One of the most valuable plants in this woodland glade scheme is *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch' AGM, adding colour from late July to November.'

## 3. Light catcher

David Harber, renowned for spectacular sculptures, creates the ultimate light-catching gleaming steel garden centrepiece. 'Designed to harness the magic of the sun's light and shadows, the *Iris Torus* can reflect a sunrise or sunset and bounce sunlight around the garden; the shadows within and cast by the sculpture also have a gentle dynamic of their own. One side is a smooth convex mirrored surface reflecting its environment – lawn, garden, trees, sky, clouds, vapour trails and stars at night. The opposing convex face has been cut into a delicate lattice pattern, mirrored on the outside and with a coloured interior seen through the gaps in the lattice. Importantly, it is also internally illuminated by night, giving a magical lantern effect.' →



PHOTOGRAPHS (2) PAUL PICTON; (3) CLIVE NICHOLS; (4) JONATHAN BUCKLEY



# 4.

## Pot luck

Gardener, teacher and writer Sarah Raven is famed for her brilliant use of colour in the garden and makes no exception when it comes to containers. 'Often overlooked, autumn is especially rich in ingredients, flowers, foliage and edibles that can be combined to create spectacular displays to last through to first frosts.' With more than 350 pots on the go at Perch Hill, Sarah, adept at trialled and tested recipes, introduces new varieties suitable for all containers – huge, large or small, single or multiples, zinc, terracotta or stone. 'A foolproof favourite is this weathered terracotta pot, planted with *Dahlia* 'Dreamy Nights', *Verbena tenera* 'Sissinghurst' and *Verbena* 'Showboat Dark Violet'. For inspiration and tips see Sarah's new book, *A Year Full of Pots* (£27, Bloomsbury); sarahraven.com.



## 5. Leading light

Strong design elements carry weight in every season, and resilient structural features, hard landscaping, water features, architectural trees, shrubs and grasses come to the fore as more ephemeral trappings subside. With diminishing daylight, thoughtful garden lighting can be used to highlight and maximise these features and to practically light the garden, making it more accessible, says Light House Designs director Jo Mann. 'Warm-temperature lighting is visually inviting, tempting you outdoors long after dusk. Pathways and lower planting can be accentuated using spike lights, while uplighting carries light aloft, creating a soft, warm flare up into the tree canopy. Balance over symmetry is important to generate a soft, natural effect, and by choosing not to light within the water, the interest lies in the reflections,' Jo adds.

## 6. Living sculptures

Garden designer Nigel Dunnett's own woodland garden features naturalistic log waves that drift across the space, framing fairy-light grasses, *Deschampsia cespitosa* and *Molinia caerulea*, late-season rudbeckias and wisps of evergreen euphorbia. The sculpted, 20-30cm-deep log stacks, 'create a year-round focal point but also have huge biodiversity value, providing habitat and food for overwintering small mammals, birds and insects. Over time the log piles rot down and decay a little, which advantageously encourages the growth of autumn fruiting fungi. However, to overcome slight subsidence and maintain the wave effect each winter, I gently reshape and top up the logs as and where required.' →



PHOTOGRAPHS (5) TOM ST AUBYN; (6) NIGEL DUNNETT; (7) MARK LORD



## 7.

### Frame work

Garden designer Jo Alderson insists 'structure is paramount; a garden must work well through all seasons'. As the planting subsides, a garden's structural foundation becomes elevated, altering the emphasis and appearance of its features. The simple, bold geometry of Jo's design showcases dual aspects of this garden. Vertically, the espaliered apple tree frames veil and filter sunlight but don't block the vista; 'they're fantastic even devoid of leaves'. Horizontally, the stone-framed pool (Heritage Handmade Garden Collections) echoes the material of the house while luminous, ever-changing reflections, light, colour, pattern and movement are introduced by water; 'water is always a winner'. Geometry continues with large verdigris patinated copper planters (also HHGC), linear box-edging and a clipped hornbeam orb, central to the design.



## 8. Quietly composed

This beautiful scheme, which balances key structural elements, gently bringing together seasonal plant highlights against a naturalistic framework of tall, autumn-flushed trees, is the creation of garden designer Butter Wakefield. The absence of hard landscaping, the meandering nature of the deep, overflowing borders and the tousled lawn set with loose, irregular stepping stones draw you to a cabin-style retreat nestled at the foot of the garden, offering an invitation to step outside, even in autumn. 'The planting offers structure with essential evergreens – clipped yew balls and fastigiate yew pillars; colour comes from a beautifully shaped cotoneaster, bursting with red berries, and stunning *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight' in full colour-infused seasonal dress. Even though the amelanchiers have lost their leaves, their naked skeletal forms continue to add interest.'

## 9. In the mix

Garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith's scheme for RHS Bridgewater's Paradise Garden is 'rich and multilayered' – a biodiverse palette of sustainable plants, grouped by region: Asia, North America and the Mediterranean. 'The garden peaks in July but it remains strong into autumn,' says Tom. 'Juxtaposition and contrast, a theme that runs through much of our work' is brilliantly executed through striking seasonal planting and crisp contemporary landscaping. The canopy of the broad-leaved catalpa and the elliptical beech are juxtaposed against a vibrant explosion of pleached Persian ironwood trees. Beneath, clouds of late-flowering lilac asters envelop fountaining grasses, rattling seed heads and cushioned ground-cover plants. The open, clean-cut geometry of the limestone terrace and bold spherical planter distinguish themselves from the flurried colourful backdrop. 📸



PHOTOGRAPHS (8) JASON INGRAM; (9) JACKY HOBBS