



1. Key plants

Whether you mix bright colours or keep things muted, choosing the right plants is the key. Here self-seeded aquilegias combine with *Geranium phaeum*, astringias and alliums in a subtle but dramatic colour palette of mauves, lilacs and clarets.



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2. The garden gate

The entrance to a garden should give you a taste of what follows. This clipped beech arch and simple gate are entirely in keeping with the orderly path beyond, and its bordering cottage garden planting.

3. Apple tree

There's often no room for more than one or two trees in a cottage garden, where space and light are needed for fruit, vegetables and flowers. A single apple or pear tree in the lawn looks and feels right, and offers a shady place to sit in summer.

4. In plain view

The essence of the cottage garden is its visibility, whether seen over a low wall, a hedge or, as here, through a transparent gate. Left ajar, the fact that this lovely reclaimed metal field gate has been allowed to go rusty downplays its decorative features.

5. Made by hand

Cottage gardens are personal spaces and often proclaim their individuality at the entrance. There is something incredibly appealing about this simple cleft gate, made with split timber planks of unequal size and the very opposite of anything machine-made.



Arne Maynard is a leading garden designer based in London and Monmouthshire

Cottage garden style

Cottage gardens are about practicality, good husbandry and pride in your growing skills. They're also a wonderful opportunity for riotous and colourful planting

WORDS ARNE MAYNARD

DESIGN IDEAS

6. Reclaimed materials

The cottage garden should be dominated by plants, with only a small amount of hard landscaping. Here, abundant planting spills on to a narrow path of loosely laid, reclaimed brick in which the joints have been left un-mortared to allow mosses to gather and plants to self-seed in true cottage-garden style.



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7. Beautiful balance

A whole scramble of things grow in front of a lovely old timbered house that looks as though it has been this way forever. House and plants co-exist in harmony. Tidiness is not the point and the effect is achieved partly by choosing the right kind of roses for the purpose – this one is a vigorous climber.



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8. Working areas

Produce is an essential part of the cottage garden ethos, and I'd put a plot for vegetables where it can be seen. Here practicality and ornament combine in a working area of the garden, with runner beans on metal arches framing a simple chipping path.



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My memories of growing up in a small village in Dorset in the late 1960s and 1970s will always influence my idea of cottage gardens. For me, the cottage garden has a strong element of functionality. It doesn't have structures or grand terraces, and space is often limited. The art of cottage gardening was to get as much out of the area as possible, and to nourish the family. The people who made them were gardeners, and proud of their skills. There'd be amazing flowers, many grown for practical and medicinal as well as ornamental purposes. With the busy lives we lead today, I think this functionality is a beautiful principle to come back to, and

it's the heartbeat of a cottage garden: a place to grow vegetables and flowers all mixed in together.

The gardens I remember – and the ones that still inspire me – used vernacular materials. They might have had a flint-and-brick wall in front, or a native hedge that was a bit bumpy and clipped growing on a raised bank. There might be a briar rose growing into the hedge, or apple trees growing out if it – a space-saving device so the tree would overhang the boundary on to the lane. On the verge there would be long grass with ox-eye daisies.

These are the elements I draw on when I'm making a cottage garden, and I'll often put an



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9. Keeping it simple

There's a wonderful sense of happy profusion in this garden, with planting barely held in check by the edge of the grass path. Cottage garden planting should never look contrived. Rather than designing them on paper, the most effective way to get the shapes of beds and paths is to mark them straight on to the ground where they feel right.

10. Cottage garden crafts

It's nice to add a bit of temporary structure to beds of soft planting, as here among tulips, where we use domes of hazel for training roses. This method of training old roses encourages increased flowering and the domes are lovely, crafted objects in themselves.

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apple tree to one side of the gate, so that you're stooping down under the boughs to go in. It's about reducing scale, because in a true cottage garden everything is crammed in.

To one side of the path there might be a vegetable garden. Mixed in with the vegetables and fruit would be a few rows of sweet peas and, later, chrysanthemums, because these could be cut and sold to supplement the family's income.

Again, this element of functionality is important, and the danger now with making a cottage garden is that it can become themed, and lose the connection with its roots. It's not a place for grand borders, intricate gates or smart furniture.

Often, the work I do as a designer could be called editing – that is, salvaging a garden that should be a cottage garden but has become filled with inappropriate plants and structures. We'll strip it back to nature, keeping anything that can be used. We might layer boundary hedges if necessary, or cut them back: a cottage garden should be visible, its exuberance shared with the outside world and not hidden away behind high hedges.

The approach ought to be soft and a bit naïve, but it should also have a mark of individuality, something that distinguishes it. This might be a quirky touch of formality such as the topiary shapes or birds you see occasionally in village

DESIGN IDEAS

11. The joy of gardening

Mounds of soft herbaceous planting are the dominant ingredient in cottage gardens. Climbers on the house walls and a few shrubs on the outer edges provide some woody structure, but the emphasis is on the seasonal flowers.

12. Show time

Cottage garden planting is not about meticulous colour co-ordination, as the lively juxtaposition of these many-coloured dahlias shows. Traditionally, dahlias were grown for cutting and for late summer colour.

13. Cutting flowers

Fragrance is an essential part of the cottage garden experience and every cottage gardener should find room for some sweet peas to scramble up some twiggy hazel poles, either among the herbaceous plants, or in the vegetable garden with other annuals grown for cutting.

14. Happy accident

Creating a genuine cottage garden is about spontaneity and a sense that the plants are gardening themselves. Here *Verbena bonariensis* has self-seeded itself in a way that could not be planned.



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11 STEPHEN ROBSON / NITEL



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12 & 13 MARIANNE MAIERUS / 14 DENNY LULLY / GARDEN WORLD IMAGES; 15 GEORGINA LANE / GARDEN WORLD IMAGES



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15. Old-fashioned favourites

Lupins are classic cottage garden plants, obligingly self-seeding themselves from one year to the next around the garden. They are seen planted here in a great swathe of pinks, mauves and purples against a backdrop of green, with alliums and flag irises in the foreground.

Stockists

Sweet peas

Peter Grayson offers seeds from his collection of old-fashioned sweet peas, by mail order. For a catalogue call 01246 278503.

Dahlias

For a fantastic selection of colours and types by mail order, contact Rose Cottage Plants on 01992 573 775 or go to www.rosecottageplants.co.uk

Dianthus

Mark and Elaine Tremain of Southview Nurseries hold the National Collection of old-fashioned pinks. Chequers Lane, Eversley Cross, Hook, Hampshire RG27 0NT. Tel 0118 973 220, www.southviewnurseries.co.uk

▷ front gardens. I think there should always be a gate – something simple, either metal or wood, plain or painted, but never coloured with a wood stain.

The plants are the main ingredients and lawns should be beautiful, with daisies and clover. You can frame cut grass with uncut, having, for example, a border of long grass planted with ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) alongside a hedge.

Large terraces aren't suitable for cottage gardens. At most there should be a little pad of basket-weave brick or chippings just big enough for a small table and a couple of chairs. Anything larger sits on the grass. The same with the paths. Keep them narrow and use local bricks, cobbles, anything that might

have been salvaged from an old building or gathered from the fields. Formal borders and too many straight lines are out of place. Apart from the path to the front door, allow paths to meander around the garden and use them to define the areas for planting. Internal divisions, say around a vegetable plot, should be soft, a simple structure of chicken wire and wooden posts (with the bark on) looks genuine.

A true cottage garden is not designed like a herbaceous border, but has evolved through associations and collaborations: a gift from a friend, seeds and cuttings from someone else. The herbaceous planting should look as though it has been scattered around.

The key plants I always use are aquilegias, sweet rocket, lupins and hollyhocks – plants that reliably self-seed and migrate around the garden, turning up somewhere unexpected. This self-gardening look is what we're after. Fragrant honeysuckles will scramble up an apple tree or into a hedge; roses such as 'Cécile Brunner', 'Albertine' and 'Rambling Rector' can be allowed to be more casual and don't need to be formally trained. If there's a blank wall on one side of the house, grow an espalier apple or pear against it. In among the flowers, use shrubs with a rural feel – guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), *V. carlesii*, lilac, mock orange (*Philadelphus*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera x purpusii*). Stick to traditional cottage garden trees –

apples, pears, plums and cherries, an oak or an ash – rather than purely ornamental species.

Get the details right: put an old wooden barrel for catching rainwater by the back door, plain terracotta pots and not too many of them, simple furniture left outside to weather naturally. Use hazel sticks for sweet peas or runner beans, materials you might have gathered from the garden or a nearby wood because, above all, cottage gardens need to feel connected to their locality. □

• What are your favourite plants for a perfect cottage garden? Please write and share your ideas – email letters@gardensillustrated.com
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