



Liz Nicklin and Kate Phillips



A feast OF BEAUTY

MANDY BRADSHAW chats to two Evesham nursery owners about why their budding blooms are a cut above the rest



LIZ Nicklin and Kate Phillips' nursery garden defies all expectations. A modest one acre, it packs in more plants that plots three times the size. It's essentially a business garden, which, with only a few notable exceptions, rarely results in much beyond the purely functional yet this is one that's memorable. Even the entrance, a narrow gateway between houses in the heart of Evesham, gives no hint of what lies beyond.

I always have to allow extra time when visiting the sisters. Not only do they have a wealth of growing experience that make them the ideal people to consult for plant suggestions, the nursery garden is the horticultural equivalent of a sweet shop with every foot of border yielding yet another group of plants that need closer inspection.

And there are plenty of borders. This is strictly a plant-based garden: no grass; adequate but not over-generous paths; barely a square inch of bare soil showing in the height of season. Things are grouped loosely in themes but the word loosely is telling. In this garden plants are grown for their own beauty rather than for some overarching design.

"There is very little formal about our free-flowing garden," comments Kate.

So, although the top area – the only part on flat ground – is a series of beds that move from hot colours at one end through to cool blues at the other, the rectangular shape of the beds is the only regimented element as plants spill over the edges

"However much we try to make this end formal beds they are overflowing," says Liz.

The hot colours at this time of year are supplied by her growing hemerocallis collection with the brick orange 'George' and smaller orange 'Tuscawilla Tigress' among the showstoppers. At the other end of the spectrum, geraniums, scabious and penstemon give a cooler note.

Colour theming appears in more beds further into the garden. The 'Sunshine Bed' has roses, sisyrinchium, golden marjoram, hypericum and *Alchemilla*

mollis while the 'Jewel Border' is a rich mix of purple elder, dark cotinus, penstemon and scarlet crocosmia.

Sometimes it's a plant theme that is chosen. The 'Grass Border' counts miscanthus, stipa, and *Briza media*, the quaking grass, among its components. Notable here is *Cortaderia richardii*, the New Zealand pampas grass, which is more delicate than its more commonly grown cousin, and a variegated version with a yellow stripe.

I've lost of how many times the sisters have pointed out 'the last bed' over the years; two more have been added since the final bed of my previous visit. That is now a nicely established gravel border of dianthus, sea lavender, *Crambe maritima*, kniphofia and penstemon.

The newest include one for Liz's recent hemerocallis acquisitions and a small 'orchard'. This is a group of fruit trees underplanted with a wild flower meadow feel: Love-in-a-mist has done well this year but there are also lots of pink corn-cockles and ox-eye daisies are waiting to be added.

If the borders weren't enough, the pair also plant up containers. Dahlias are grown in a wooden 'crate' that allows the sisters to cover them in straw and wrap the whole thing to protect the tubers over winter. Elsewhere, a low container shows off some fine sempervivums.

More often than not it is the individual plant that demands attention: *Potentilla atrosanguinea* 'Sundermannii', which has yolk yellow flowers with an orange centre and velvety silver foliage; the dark purple blooms of *Trifolium rubens*; *Kniphofia* 'Toffee Nose', whose flowers move from creamy yellow, through caramel to toffee at the top.

Recently, more seats have been added, tucked in amongst the beds to allow visitors to sit and enjoy the garden – or maybe just to catch their breath after such a horticultural onslaught.

"It's all very blousy," admits Kate. "There's almost too much to see."

■ **Harrell's Hardy Plants Nursery Garden, Rudge Road, Evesham, is open tomorrow (July 19) from 2-5pm for the National Gardens Scheme. Admission is £3.**

MEET THE DESIGNER



Award-winning Gloucestershire designer Paul Hervey-Brookes will be bringing traditional English gardening to Tatton Park this week.

His design, for gardening charity Perennial, will include elements of a large English country estate to reflect the organisation's roots in the country's large gardens. Perennial offers advice and support to people working in or retired from horticulture.

Long mixed borders, inspired by Arley Hall in Cheshire and Warwickshire's Upton House, will have a wide range of herbaceous perennials, including rudbeckia, helenium, asters, dark-leaved dahlias and tall grasses. A separate walled kitchen garden will be packed with vegetables, fruit and herbs, and there will be a pavilion for relaxing and a gardener's bothy.

It's the first time Berkeley-based Paul has exhibited at Tatton, having won gold at all the other main RHS shows as well as Best in Show at The Gardening World Cup.

"I am really excited to be creating the Garden at Tatton," he said. "It's going to be a busy show mentoring the Young Designers of the Year as they create their gardens alongside building what is essentially a Main Avenue Chelsea-sized garden for Perennial but we have a great team and story to tell so I can't wait to get started!"

■ **The RHS Flower Show Tatton Park runs from Wednesday to Sunday (July 22-26). For more information, visit rhs.org.uk/tatton**



LEWIS GARDEN PERENNIAL PAUL HERVEY-BROOKES



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