



"I use tiers of plants to make the borders billow"

Colourful layers of planting bring this country garden to life – set off by an immaculate green lawn. Christine and Paul Davies treat us to a tour



IN THE GARDEN WITH...

Christine and Paul Davies

AT Fieldcrest, Thornton Common Rd, Thornton Hough, Wirral CH63 0LT
SIZE OF GARDEN 1.3 acres
GARDEN FEATURES Colourful planting; productive potager garden; wildflower meadow dotted with fruit trees; yew walk; 'bold' woodland garden; bird and butterfly border; trees and grasses; 'country lane'
VISIT THE GARDEN Open 2 Sept, 1-4pm for NGS. Visit website www.fieldcrestgarden.co.uk for openings and group bookings
CONTACT Christine on 0151 334 8878 or email chris@fieldcrest.co.uk

Christine and Paul Davies had an unusual conundrum when they took on their garden at Fieldcrest, Cheshire, ten years ago. How do you transform a former strawberry farm into a garden? It's not the sort of thing you can look up in a gardening encyclopedia... and, unfortunately, no strawberry plants had been left behind!

"When we first arrived, one side of the garden was completely covered in ridges of blue plastic mulch where the strawberry plants used to be," explains Christine. "The rest of the garden had been laid out into paths and borders. We were going to keep the layout roughly as it was, but we eventually decided enough was enough and the ridges and plastic had to go."

The ground was duly ploughed up by a local farmer

and Christine and Paul were able to start again from scratch, creating a large expanse of sculpted lawn, deep mixed borders packed with tiers of colourful planting, productive potager beds and a wildflower meadow dotted with fruit trees. Seasonal highlights include spires of lupins and lythrum as well as cheerful drifts of dianthus, monarda, sweet peas and crocosmia. "We have quite a few crocosmias in the garden," says Christine. "I have 'Emily Mackenzie', 'George Davidson' and 'Lucifer'. Everybody likes 'Lucifer'; I think it's because it's a strong-growing variety and spreads itself quite well. I'm quite happy to let them spread about."



Christine has ME but despite having limited capacity for physical gardening, she's been able to divert her energies into

running the Fieldcrest gardening school. "We have a packed programme of events and workshops," she explains, "with expert tutors on topics as diverse as creating a prize-winning lawn, better garden photography, growing salads, edible flowers and herbs for tea-making, gardening for wildlife and propagation."

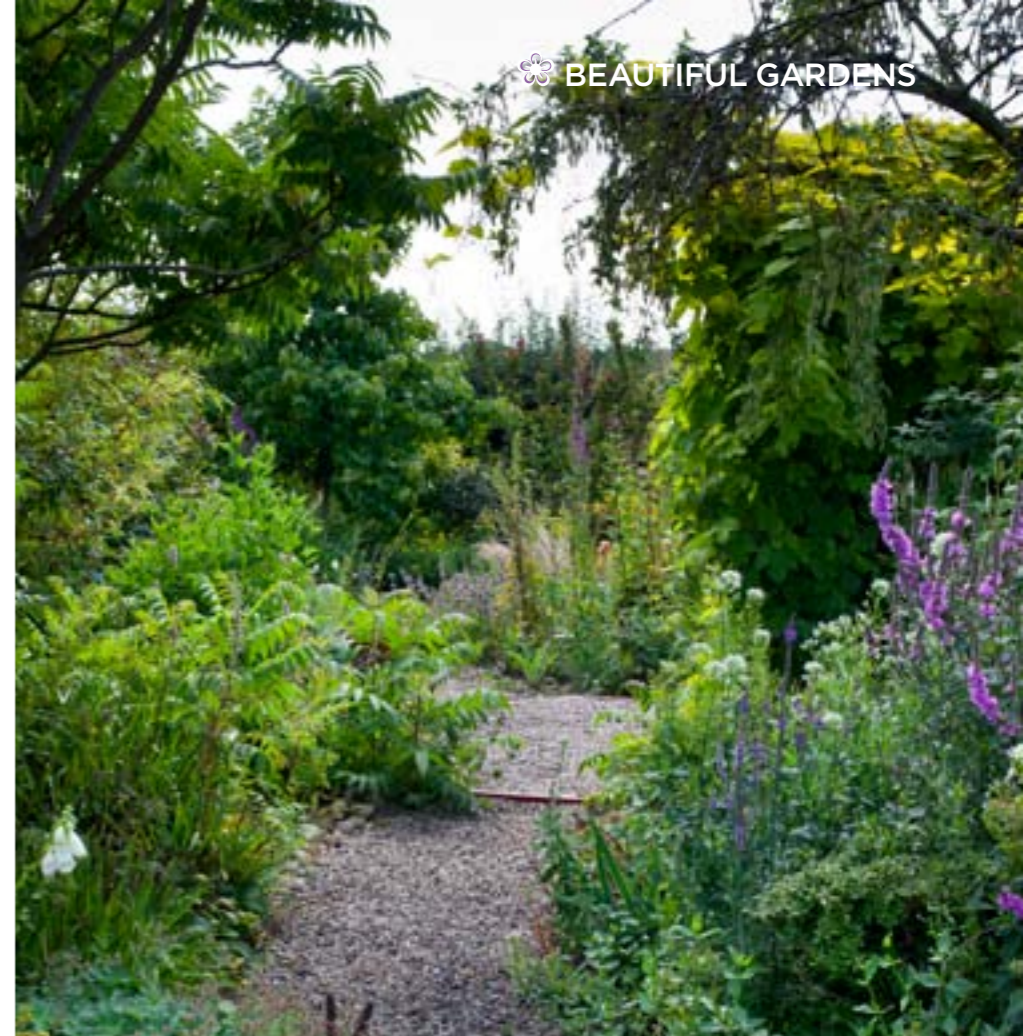
Christine's own delectable borders offer rich inspiration for the Fieldcrest students. "I love choosing the plants while Paul is on hand to tackle the heavy jobs and keep the lawn in good shape," she says.

Christine's borders are 'tiered' so that the flowers billow down from the back to make a wall of colour. "I like a garden to look natural rather than forced," she says. "I remember Geoff Hamilton's artisan cottage garden which he made for TV and that has been the sort of look I've tried to create here."

Beyond Paul's vast, immaculate, bowling-green lawn is an artfully unkempt wildflower meadow. "We cut the meadow in late summer which gives the flowers

"I like a garden to look natural rather than forced. I remember Geoff Hamilton's artisan cottage garden he made for TV and that's the look I've gone for here"

COTTAGE FLOWERS (clockwise from top left) Almost a metre high, spires of purple loosestrife (*Lythrum virgatum*) create dense, decorative clumps; lofty crocosmia 'Lucifer' lends its fiery sprays to the middle of borders; plants such as blue nigella and tall spires of verbasicum are encouraged to self seed between orange dahlia 'David Howard' and pink 'Gerrie Hoek'; sweet peas in rich purple tones clamber up netting; lavatera 'Barnsley' provides tall stems of pale pink flowers; wispy stems of pink achillea make pretty partners for white leucanthemum



TOP LEFT After pretty white spring flowers, the glossy red berries of *Viburnum opulus* are set off by green foliage in late summer **LEFT** *Buddleia davidii* is ransacked by a hungry red admiral **BOTTOM LEFT** The dainty white flowers of *Gaura lindheimeri* 'Whirling Butterfly' appear to float above the plants, shimmering in the slightest breeze **ABOVE** Borders are deep at Fieldcrest, with gravel paths that plunge through the planting. Here stands of tall purple lythrum grow beside white *Centranthus ruber* 'Albus', geraniums and trees including a stately sumach

enough time to set seed. I thought it would be more interesting to have longer grass around our fruit trees, so I told Paul that we already had enough lawn!"

Plants such as viburnum 'Roseum' and buddleia 'Lochinch' add colour in this wilder area. "The berries arrived early last year, which meant they were out at the same time as the buddleia," says Christine. "It was a happy coincidence because they made such a nice combination."

Another highlight is Christine's delicious-sounding Chocolate Border. "It's full of plants with chocolate-themed names: chocolate cosmos, aquilegia 'Fruit and Nut Chocolate', rose 'Hot Chocolate', heuchera 'Chocolate Ruffles' and dahlia 'Twyning's After Eight,'" she explains. "It was going to be a bed of white flowers until the rose that I thought was white turned out to be pink! Then I realised I had a buddleia 'Black Night' in there too..."

Christine also grows lots of achillea – the archetypal country garden plant, with its delicate flat umbels of colour that seem to float above the soft foliage. "I like to let it spread," she says. "The flowers are nice and light and I leave the heads on to encourage birds over autumn. Achillea is one of those

plants that seems to grow in most places and it looks especially good with feverfew."

Christine's attention is on her potager garden at the moment. "The raised beds are split into 1m (39in) sections, which makes them easier to tend and harvest," she explains. "It's a mix of fruit, veg and flowers which I find helps to keep it looking good all year round – otherwise it can be empty for a long time over winter. Besides, growing veg and flowers together makes me plan a lot more, which is a good thing because otherwise I end up with either too much or too little of the same vegetable. But it does mean there's never a down time. I'm experimenting with sowing wildflowers with my carrots this year."

One of the biggest challenges the couple face now is the fact the garden is quite exposed – despite the fact it's surrounded by mature trees. "The winter before last really took its toll," Christine says ruefully. "The exposed situation meant that a lot of mature shrubs were lost or damaged as temperatures plummeted. But, looking on the bright side, I'm always adding new plants and changing things around, so losing plants simply means new opportunities to plant more!" 🌸



ABOVE Dense planting creates a jungly feel, with sumach, white foxgloves, lythrum and white *Centranthus ruber* 'Albus' **BELOW** Framing the lawn are neatly edged borders packed with layers of plants for a wall of colour. In the foreground are pink achillea and yellow pincushion flowers of *Santolina virens* and pink lupins; further back are dark-leaved lythrum and distant *Stipa gigantea* **LEFT** Foliage of tanacetum 'Isla Gold' **MIDDLE LEFT** Spidery flowers of yellow inula **BOTTOM LEFT** Yellow hemerocallis

