



Easy design ideas to perk up your plot

Hannah Stephenson shares secrets to making an allotment look its best



Water features create a calming effect and can encourage beneficial insects to visit your garden.

Picture: Alamy/PA

ALLOTMENTS bring rich harvests of fruit and veg but so often end up functional rather than beautiful to look at.

But it doesn't have to be that way if you use ornamental edibles and pretty, scented herbs to enhance your plot, says gardening expert, author and YouTube star Huw Richards.

Go vertical

"Use a vertical layer. A lot of allotments are quite traditional, in that they'll have their rows of potatoes and rows of carrots, and then maybe on one end, they'll have all of their runner beans, whereas if you created a few pyramid structures throughout your allotment and splitting the vertical layers it creates a warm inviting look and a feeling of 'what's around the corner?'."

Water worlds

"Think about water and reflections. Even finding something like a half an old whiskey barrel, or you could even buy a pre-made little pond and you just fill it with water and plant around it.

"When you've got that reflection or slightly glistening water, it creates a calming feel. It's fantastic for encouraging beneficial insects in your garden to help you with your natural pests and disease control."

Use curves

Create curving pathways or "nodes", advises Richards: "You can have your herb node, your soft fruit node, your vegetable nodes. So you've got like different areas, but, but they're all in circles or edges rather than straight lines."

Play with texture

"I like to play with texture with leaves, so for instance fennel has an amazing leaf texture which contrasts with Swiss chard and maybe something like oca, also known as New Zealand yam. I once grew them all in a bed together and let them grow between each other. It's dancing with the idea of managed wilderness.

"You want to encourage some things to maybe spill over the sides, but you want to make sure that they don't quite take over. It's like stealth maintenance."

Let some veg flower

"Break up the green with pops of colour in flowers. If allotmenters still have a few parsnips and leeks left, leave a few to flower, so you're treating an edible as an ornamental. Parsnips produce a 1.8m high, amazing umbelliferous flower. Leeks produce big allium flowers which are bumble bee magnets. This also contributes to a more vertical layer."

Make the most of herbs

"I see very few perennial herbs and allotments beyond mint, thyme, and rosemary. I'm a massive fan of Korean mint or agastache.

"You can get flowers in different colours. If you grow it from seed, you will have a really lovely mature plant by mid to late summer that just pumps out flowers until the first frosts."

Structured planting

"Put the tallest (plant) in the middle, so the design is almost like a cone. Or if you just want some pretty flowers, put a selection of maybe three dahlia varieties in the middle and mix of other flowers such as zinnias, borage, and bronze calendula around it."

Growing cut flowers on allotments is also popular, he says.

Install seating

"To make allotments a nice place you have to have some kind of seating area. A lot of people miss out because they turn the allotment into a chore where there's one job, which is to grow veg."

Richards adds: "Even if you had two logs and a plank of wood over it and a little coffee table, you want a spot to sit and relax and enjoy it."

GARDENNOTES

- Fermoy Flower and Garden club will host Sheila Gilbert for a demonstration 'Summer Revels' on Tuesday, May 6, in the Adair Hall Fermoy at 8pm. All welcome. Visitors €10.
- Tramore Road Campus holds its annual plant sale Wednesday and Thursday, May 7 and 8, showcasing the horticulture students' work. Plants available include annuals, perennials and herbs, 9am to 4pm, all welcome.
- Kanturk Flower and Garden Club will meet Wednesday, May 7 at 8pm, in the Temperance Hall, Kanturk, with guest speaker Sonya McGee, herbalist from Ballymaloe Cookery School. Sonya will speak on drying herbs, creating infused teas, and medicinal wellbeing. Entry €5, and refreshments will be served. Details of annual outing in June will be announced.
- The Garden Show is taking place once again this year in Broadford, Co Limerick. The event kicks off at 9.30am on Saturday, May 10, in the local community centre, P56 D402. It will include insightful talks from a diverse range of speakers on sustainable floristry, soil care and composting, designing and planting a mixed garden, and edible plants. The day will also feature a guided walk to the local arboretum from Eanna Ni Lamhna, a plant auction, and much more.
- Clonakilty Flower Club will hold its gala charity night on Monday, May 12, at 8pm in the GAA Complex, Ahamilla, Clonakilty. Demonstrator is Harumi Langford of AOIFA. Proceeds in aid of Co-Action (remembering Ella Cahill) and the AOIFA national charity, Breast Cancer Ireland. The event includes a sales table and refreshments. Admission €20.
- Eileen O'Brien of Kinsale Garden & Flower Club, along with Kinsale fashion boutiques MadforStyle, Ms Ellie's Boutique and hAttitude present 'Fun with Fashion and Flowers' in Actons Hotel, Kinsale, Wednesday, May 14, at 8pm. Proceeds are in aid of the Friary Renovation Fund. Tickets available from The Friary Office, on the door, or by contacting Nicola Desmond at 086-8515371 or Eileen O'Brien at 021-4773256.
- Floral art and horticulture, and fruit and vegetable competitions are now open on Corksummershow.com. The **Cork Summer Show**, organised by the Munster Agricultural Society, takes place on June 14-15 at Curraheen Showgrounds, Cork.
- Do you have a news item or garden club event for Garden Notes? Email gardening@examiner.ie