CASE STUDY

Won't you come into the garden?

A low-slung planting scheme allows this Kinross garden to make the most of its countryside surroundings

Photography **Mark Jamieson Property Photography**
Words **Miriam Methuen-Jones**

Talking gardens with Lisa Lempsink is a joy. She radiates passion for her subject, with all the knowledge and creativity of her two decades as a designer. Case in point: this Kinross garden that's full of pretty planting.

"It's an open, sunny, south-facing garden surrounded by farmland and fields, with views over to Loch Leven in one direction," says Lisa. "As a result of that openness, it can be very windy and quite cold. We were working with almost coastal conditions, despite being far inland, so we needed to establish lots of tough plants."

The owner wanted the garden to be private and wildlife-friendly and require relatively little in the way of maintenance. There's a public right-of-way running down one side, so the designer's first task was to extend an existing hedge to create a natural barrier against ramblers and peepers. Elsewhere, though, height was deliberately restricted.

"We did something very basic when we were working out the planting scheme," Lisa explains. "I asked the client to sit in a ►

BRIEF To create a natural garden that would complement the landscape beyond its boundaries

DESIGN Lisa Lempsink

CONSTRUCTION Traquair Paving & Restoration

DIMENSIONS 35m x 15m

PLANTING GUIDE

Don't be afraid to mix typically formal plants into an informal planting scheme. "Every garden should be a space that reflects what the individual owner wants," advises Lisa. "I don't think there's one thing that should go into every garden. Except perhaps relaxation – we could all do with some more of that!"

Previous pages An overview of the garden with glorious green hills in the background. **Top left** A border of Red Baron grasses fits in beautifully with the hot colour palette. Other grasses mix with perennials, but there's a distinct lack of shrubs: "Shrubs are lovely, but they're bulky. We wanted a more delicate prettiness here." **Right** A closer look at the central bed. You can just make out the greenhouse roof. **Below right** Pink and purple accents snuck into the scheme. They work particularly well against the yellow leaves of the *Berberis thunbergii* 'Maria'

chair on the patio and we held up a measuring tape to check what she could see. We took a measurement of where she could see over the tape and used this as the absolute maximum height for the plants." This results in the eye being drawn naturally over the meticulous planting, past the boundaries of the garden and out to the countryside beyond. This 'borrowed landscape' method has been used for centuries to create a seamless look.

The client's house is quite linear and angular, so Lisa decided to play with organic shapes. "The land beyond is soft – lots of swerves and contours," she says. "The garden acts as a bridge between the sharp house and the soft countryside. I started with a circular bed, which is the most formal aspect of the garden."

The planting in both borders is identical and the central bed is edged with *Imperata rubra* 'Red Baron' grass. "It's a fantastic short grass that only grows to 30cm tall. It starts off green and becomes blood-red as the summer goes on. It's very translucent, too, so it's beautiful in the sunlight. I think it looks magical. In the winter it dries out into a deep pinky-red and then revitalises itself by about May."

Paths snake off this central bed and down through the garden. They were designed with a wheelbarrow in mind as there's a small greenhouse at the bottom of the garden, full of tomato plants, grow bags and seedlings. The greenhouse is almost a secret; it sits on a slightly lower level and is only visible as you approach the end of the garden. Beyond it, an impressive mature oak tree breaks up the pastoral landscape.

The curves of the main circle of planting are carefully repeated elsewhere in the garden, with expanses of lawn left for the owner's dog to run about on. "It was quite a bold, strong design before the plants were put in," says Lisa. "I suppose it still is! This is a statement garden."

A hot palette of reds and oranges benefits from a few touches of purple and blue ("The client loves lavender") and the area nearest the house has more of a woodland feel with small trees and astilbes. "White is a great colour for shade," Lisa believes. "It looks more luminous there as opposed to in direct sunlight. Think of the way snowdrops light up the woods." Elsewhere, herbaceous perennials and grasses dominate the planting scheme, with guest appearances from red-hot pokers, *Kniphofia* 'Nancy's Red'.

Considering the owner requested a low-maintenance garden, it is quite densely planted; this, though, is actually to help with the suppression of weeds. "All my clients ask for a low-maintenance garden," laughs Lisa. "Most of the plants we used here only need a tidy-up once or twice a year. This is not a stressful garden to look after. For the owner, much of the pleasure is in the gentle maintenance." ***lempsink.co.uk***