

A reclaimed lamppost can be glimpsed through this walkway. Beyond is a striking pair of standard *Magnolia x soulangeana* 'Rustica Rubra'.

# EYE for DETAIL

The success of Wendy and David Dugdill's richly textured Sussex garden lies in their inventive use of container planting

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<#L#> | MARCH 2011

A vibrant display of spring plants is the first thing that strikes you about the garden of Ocklynge Manor, the Georgian home in Sussex that Wendy Dugdill shares with her husband, David. The drama is enhanced by a surprising selection of shrubs and trees, in particular azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons and acers. They are surprising because Ocklynge sits on a solid chalk base. Furthermore, the surrounding belt of trees, including a rare Manna ash – *Fraxinus ornus*, which flowers in the first week of June – casts an amount of shade that generally precludes brightly coloured plants.

Wendy, for whom gardening is an enduring passion, explains that achieving these results has taken 22 years. "When we first came here," she says, "there was just a lawn surrounded by trees. I kept wondering why no one had done anything to the garden in recent years and fell into the trap of thinking that the answer was to plant things." As a dedicated teacher, she had little time to do more than find space for the many plants she was given as presents, but she frequently found that they failed to thrive; herbaceous plantings, especially, seemed to be doomed. Historical research, however, revealed that the site had long been cultivated – it was tended in Roman times before becoming a Commandery for the Knights of St John – so the Dugdills were convinced there was a solution to be found.

Inspired by visits both to gardens in Europe and architectural plant nurseries and also by extensive background reading, Wendy understood that the secret lay in planting the things she wanted in containers. In that way, she could provide the plants with the soil conditions they would need to survive. So began the planting up of containers with acid-loving plants such as *Acer palmatum*, *Cornus kousa* 'Venus', *Rhododendron* 'Purple Splendour' and *Trachycarpus fortunei*.

Each pot is tended on a three-year rotational basis; plants are removed from their containers in the third year so that the soil can be replaced and the roots clipped to ensure the compact, almost bonsai shapes that ►



**THIS PICTURE** The strong upright supports of this trellised arch add height to the garden and create framed vistas. **BELOW** The garden's acid soil means that Wendy has to grow many plants, such as this *Rhododendron* 'Purple Splendour', in pots.



A haze of self-seeded purple aquilegia and forget-me-nots spreads throughout the garden in spring.



The pink facade of the Georgian house makes a flattering backdrop for the garden's many shades of foliage and floral plantings.

MARCH 2011 | <#R#>



Layers of shape and texture, from the splayed fingers of *Trachycarpus fortunei* to clipped yew, give added depth.



The turret was built in 1720 to provide a lookout for the coach bringing the post from Eastbourne.



Wendy raises a selection of annuals every year from seed.

add structure. “Container-grown plants are much easier to prune and keep in shape than you think,” she confirms. “A Japanese visitor taught me how to pinch out the pine candles in the spring to achieve a more interesting shape.” Meanwhile, David worked on the hard landscaping, laying out a network of brick paths and building the arches and pergolas that now draw you into the garden.

As the scheme began to take shape, Wendy found herself looking at plants more closely and developing a deep appreciation of foliage. Her choices have led to the rich, textured layers we see in her garden today. “The palms,” she explains, “are a basic green with yellow tips, and both *Cordyline australis* and *Hebe variegata* are green with yellow stripes.” She values in turn the deep green of box when flushed with fresh growth, the texture of bluetinted *Picea glauca* and the shape of columnar *Cupressus sempervirens*.

There is always scope for new plants, Wendy says, but she knows that David thinks the garden “has quite enough”. In her defence, she points out that the scheme is very low maintenance and that, on the whole, it simply depends on her constant watching to keep things right. “I do most of my gardening through the windows,” she says. “I am forever looking out and wondering if I could tweak this or that. The garden is a magnet for me. I go out every day to see if things have grown.” ■

## GARDEN GUIDE

**SOIL TYPE** Shallow, free-draining soil with a clay base. Mild, frost-free climate.

**ORIENTATION** South-facing.

**SPECIAL FEATURES** Two-acre foliage garden with container-grown plants for colour. A variety of mature trees enclose the garden, including a 450-year-old holm oak. The children’s book illustrator Mabel Lucie Attwell lived here in the 1930s.

**CONTACT** Ocklynge Manor, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 2PG, is open under the National Garden Scheme on Wednesday, 4 May 2011; visit [ngs.org.uk](http://ngs.org.uk) for details.



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