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What to look forward to at the Chelsea Flower Show 2016



CREDIT: GEOFF PUGH

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By **Joanna Fortnam**

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The RHS announced its plans for Chelsea 2016 last Wednesday at the city headquarters of show sponsor M&G. On hand were RHS ambassadors Alan Titchmarsh and Mary Berry, a double whammy of TV demigods that underlines the popularity of this week-long horticultural extravaganza. The show opens to RHS members on May 24; Berry will be launching a rose named after her by Harkness.

The tally of show gardens stands at a healthy 16, three more than in 2015. A handful of heavyweight designers is joined by a flock of ambitious up-and-comers.



Anne-Marie Powell CREDIT: MARTIN POPE

The RHS hopes to breathe some excitement and urgency into its Greening Grey Britain campaign with a garden designed by [Ann-Marie Powell](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenprojects/10958610/The-hospice-garden-that-changes-young-lives.html) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenprojects/10958610/The-hospice-garden-that-changes-young-lives.html>). The plot (not part of the Show Garden competition) will provide inspiration for city gardeners who'd like to green up their street.

In the absence of any wellie-clad young royals the headlines in 2016 will no doubt be grabbed by [Diarmuid Gavin](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/9237721/Diarmuid-Gavin-Alan-Titchmarsh-scared-off-my-stalker.html) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/9237721/Diarmuid-Gavin-Alan-Titchmarsh-scared-off-my-stalker.html>), still the Damien Hirst of garden design. Harrods – a sponsor made in heaven – is backing his [Eccentric British Garden](https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/exhibitors/2016/gardens/the-harrods-eccentric-british-garden) (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/exhibitors/2016/gardens/the-harrods-eccentric-british-garden>) inspired by the national gift for zaniness, in particular cartoonist Heath Robinson. Apparently we can expect a show on the garden every 15 minutes: “Box balls set amid the floral drifts bob up and down... Conical bay trees begin to twirl... small troughs rise from the ground by means of scissor lifts to dress the first floor windows.”

Talk about stealing the spotlight.



The Modern Slavery garden

Serious horticulturists may slink quickly past the twirling topiary to seek out two distinguished plantspeople each trying their hand at a show garden for the first time. Rosy Hardy of Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants has won 20 gold medals in the Great Pavilion for her sublime plant displays in the tradition of great British plantwomen such as [Carol Klein](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardeningadvice/8243832/Carol-Klein-Life-in-a-Cottage-Garden-presenter-interview.html) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardeningadvice/8243832/Carol-Klein-Life-in-a-Cottage-Garden-presenter-interview.html>) and [Beth Chatto](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/11425861/Simply-stylish-The-Beth-Chatto-Gardens.html) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/11425861/Simply-stylish-The-Beth-Chatto-Gardens.html>). Rosy's first show garden, Forever Freefolk for Brewin Dolphin, highlights chalk streams, in particular the River Test which flows through Freefolk, Hampshire.

Also flying the flag for plant-centric gardens is Nick Bailey, curator at the [Chelsea Physic Garden](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/11808008/Botanical-art-at-the-Chelsea-Physic-Garden.html) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/11808008/Botanical-art-at-the-Chelsea-Physic-Garden.html>), whose plot for Winton Capital is themed around the Beauty of Mathematics.

The Show Garden field as a whole then divides fairly evenly into designers you've heard of and those you haven't: among the veterans is Cleve West (for M&G), with a sliver of ancient oak forest remembered from childhood holidays on Exmoor; a fellow previous Best Show Garden winner Andy Sturgeon is back for the Telegraph. He also dips into childhood memory (a trip to the Natural History Museum) with an adventurous Jurassic "captured landscape".

Papworth Trust garden

Hot on their heels are designers to watch: **James Basson** (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/11608874/Bunny-Guinness-gets-a-sneak-preview-of-the-Chelsea-Flower-Show.html>) is back with a celebratory garden for L'Occitane (it's their 40th anniversary).

Basson won hearts last year with his beautiful rendition of a countrified Provencal plot – expectations will be high. Hugo Bugg for Royal Bank of Canada, a young gold medal winner, is still building a reputation so will want to prove his credentials on the theme of sacred water. Jo Thompson (one of several women designers, an improvement on 2015), has designed a highly polished communal city garden for Qatari Diar, developer of the Chelsea Barracks.

Last among the veteran designers is Chris Beardshaw who presents the Morgan Stanley garden for Great Ormond Street Hospital, to be rebuilt at the hospital after the Show.

The remaining show gardens are typically backed by new sponsors partnered with lesser known, but up-for-it designers. Glasshouse specialists Hartley Botanic have wowed Chelsea-goers for many years with their stylish commercial stands. Their first show garden is designed by Catherine MacDonald, a gold medallist at Hampton Court. Its central feature is a glasshouse (surprise), attached to a walled garden that acts as a folly and retreat.

The Harrods show garden

The unofficial award for youngest designer meets unknown quantity could be divided between Sam Ovens, for Cloudy Bay, and Hay Hwang for LG Smart Garden. The first sponsor has won Chelsea gold before and has form backing young talent. Hay boosts the number of women first-time designers – we can expect elegant, modernist Zen.

Welcome to Yorkshire, a sponsor familiar from the Artisan category, has found the ambition this year (and the cash) to support a show garden by designer **Matthew Wilson** (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardenstovisit/7625457/The-Landscape-Man-is-this-the-reality-of-gardening.html>). Oz TV gardener **Charlie Albone** (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/gardening/gardening-tools-equipment/11624946/garden-inspiration-chelsea-flower-show.html>) won silver gilt last year – he is back with sponsors Gardena-Husqvarna. Paul Martin for Vestra Wealth has a wealth of experience as an Irish show gardener, but is a dark horse at Chelsea. Finally, a Japanese team, Chihori Shibiyama and Yano Tea for Watahan, promise a mix of East and West – new faces for a familiar concept.

Chelsea Flower Show: 100 years in pictures


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Chelsea Flower Show: a potted history



Members of the public admire irises at the 2015 Chelsea Flower Show PHOTO: GEOFF PUGH

1862

Show is born

The RHS Great Spring Show, (as it was first called) was first held in the now-vanished RHS garden in Kensington. From 1888 it was held in the gardens of the Inner Temple, on the banks of the Thames

1926

Striking workers



1913

New home



Queen Mary visits the inaugural Chelsea Flower Show in 1913 PHOTO: RHS LINDLEY LIBRARY

The RHS Great Spring Show moved location to the grounds of the Chelsea



Workers rally for the General Strike in 1926
PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

By the roaring 1920s, the Chelsea Flower Show was back in full swing, the famous Chelsea tea parties were established and Royal visits resumed.

In 1926 the show was held a week late due for the first time to the General Strike

1937 Celebrating the Empire



George VI and Queen Elizabeth pay a visit to the Chelsea Flow Show in 1937

In 1937, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth celebrated their Coronation Year and, to mark the occasion, a superb Empire Exhibition was staged. It featured wattles from Australia, pines from Canada, brilliant gladioli from East Africa and even a big prickly pear from Palestine

1988 Bloomin' big crowds



Huge crowds of people at Chelsea Flower Show in 2015 PHOTO: GEOFF PUGH

The Chelsea Flower Show continued to grow in popularity. In 1979, crowding became so severe in the morning that the turnstiles were

location to the grounds of the Chelsea Hospital. The event has been held here every year, apart from gaps during the two World Wars.

There has been an international element from the start; in 1913 French rose growers Robichon had a stand

1929

The longest-lived garden in Chelsea history is thought to be American Sherman Hoyt's cacti garden. She later donated the plants and their painted desert backdrop to Kew, who displayed the garden for over 50 years

1947 War years

The show was cancelled during the Second World War, as the land was required by the War Office for an anti-aircraft site. Some doubt arose as to whether the show would resume in 1947 as stocks were depleted and staff scarce. Fortunately it did go ahead and it was a great success

1953 Queen's Coronation



Gardeners carry plants into the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, in preparation for the Chelsea Flower Show in 1955 PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 was sufficient cause for a flower show that reflected the celebratory mood of the country. Most members of the Royal family attended that year – apart from the Queen, who was too busy!

mornings that the tunnels were temporarily closed.

In 1988 a limit of 40,000 visitors per day was imposed and members were charged for tickets for the first time

2000

Record breaking



The Chelsea Flower Show Grand Pavilion before it is raised from the ground PHOTO: RHS

Exhibitors were moved inside a giant pavilion. Prior to 2000 they were housed under a marquee, which was honoured in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest tent

1993

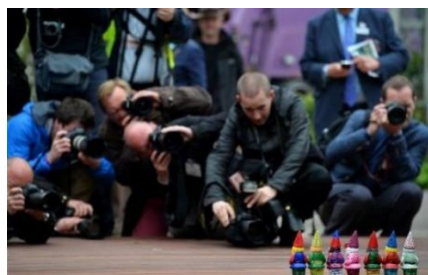


Hampton Court Palace where the Flower Show is held PHOTO: HOBERMAN COLLECTION / ALAMY

The show's programme expanded to other venues, including the takeover of the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in 1993. This increased options for both members and for exhibitors after years of debate over whether the show should move to a bigger location

2013

Welcome gnome!



Gnomes make a rare appearance at Chelsea in 2013 PHOTO: AFP

Gnomes were allowed for the first time in 2013 – but only for one year. The RHS claims “gnomes detract from the presentation of the plants or products on display, and from the general appearance of the show”

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