

# down to earth - gardening

Part Four

Part One



In the May issue Melanie and Paul took accurate measurements and drew up detailed plans of the new garden so they would know exactly what to do when it came to starting work.

Part Two



In the June issue the practical work began as the couple laid the foundations of their new garden by stripping away turf, boring holes, erecting posts and laying a decking area over the patio and steps.

Part Three



In the July/August issue it was time to select suitable plants which would require little maintenance and consider soil conditioning in order to prepare the garden for planting.

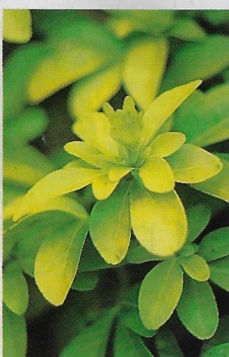
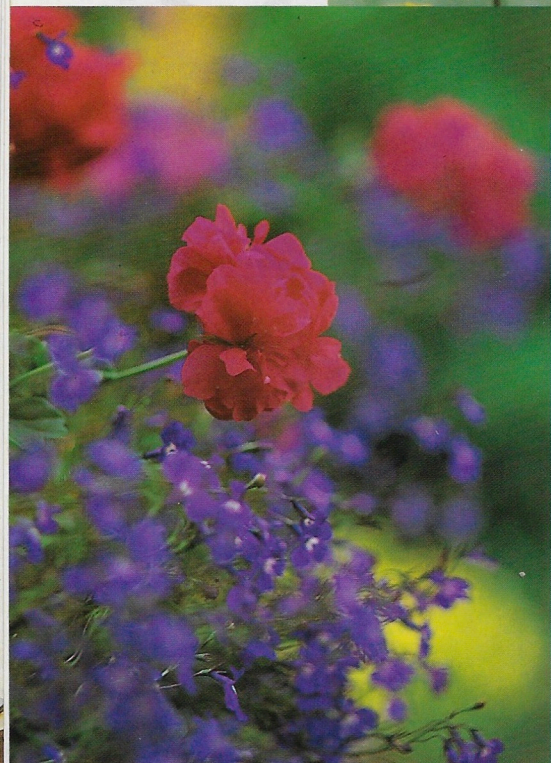
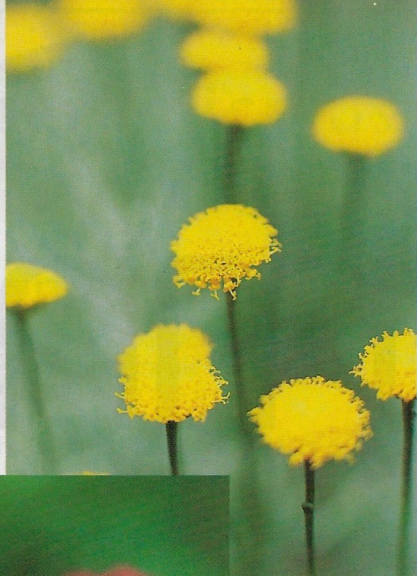


The garden makeover is complete and **Ann-Marie Powell** admires the finished result and advises on aftercare

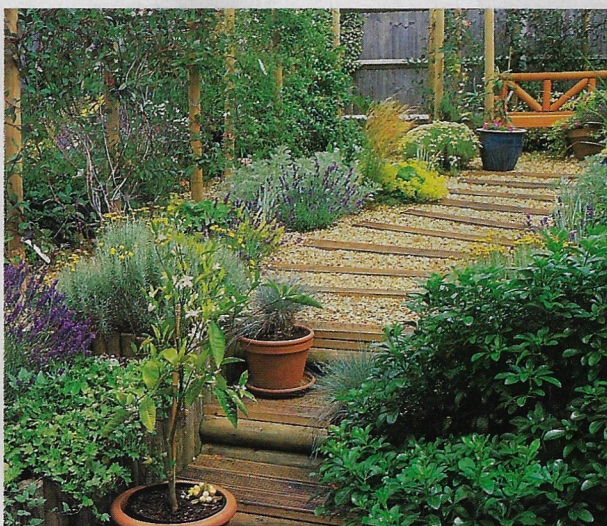




right & below:  
It only took a few  
months for the  
carefully selected  
plants to blossom  
into a glorious  
array of colour



Your garden is  
probably the most  
dynamic space  
in your home  
— don't neglect  
it, relish and  
enjoy it!



**W**hat a difference a few months can make! When I last visited Melanie and Paul's garden at the end of the building and planting stage, the bare bones of the structure were clear to see but it still had a long way to go in terms of development. Small climbers were clustered around the base of each boundary post, the gravel beds contained only a smattering of foliage and the plants in the various pots near the decking area were virtually non-existent. A couple of months later, however, and the garden is almost unrecognisable.

Paul and Melanie are delighted at the speed with which the plants have taken hold — the drab space that existed before is but a dim and distant memory. "I was worried the plants would take a while to flourish and thought we might have to wait until next summer to enjoy the garden," explains Melanie. "But the transformation has been so rapid we've been out there every day."

My main concern was that the garden



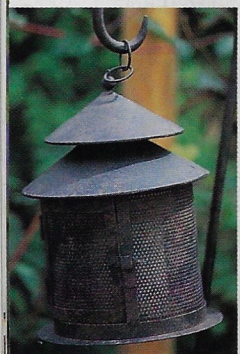
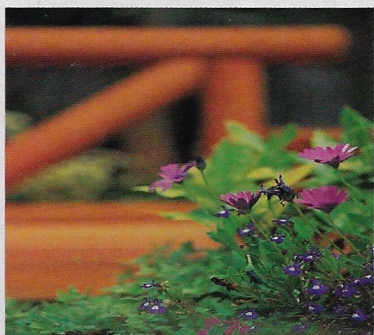
was proving to be as low maintenance as promised. The arrival of Paul and Melanie's little girl makes it all the more important that the couple don't have to spend hours tending to the plants and I was pleased to hear that our initial preparations were paying off. We had prepared the soil well to provide optimum conditions for the gravel beds, making sure they were well-drained with plenty of grit. The brown and cream gravel from Salop Sand & Gravel (01952 254101) replaced the original lawn area and we accordingly chose hardy plants suited to warmer conditions. However, they still require feeding once or twice a year with a slow-release fertiliser (fish, blood and bone is ideal) and it is also worth trimming back herbaceous perennials in the spring to avoid them becoming straggly.

All the garden has needed this summer is generous watering. In new gardens, plants can dry out very quickly once transferred to the garden soil. Water helps mix potting medium and open ground soil together, easing the transition between pot and open ground. The climbers have been tied where necessary and Paul has been stretching the strands apart, allowing light and air to circulate freely around the whole plant, thereby encouraging even growth from the base. As for pruning, I >









< told Melanie only to prune for a reason — never feel that you are neglecting your plants by not pruning. If they look healthy and are flowering freely, then leave them well alone!

The most important thing is for Melanie and Paul to keep their patio containers in prime condition with regular watering. A pot is an alien environment for plants, so they will always require a little more attention. We had lined our pots with punctured plastic bags to stop water evaporating quite so quickly and had incorporated a slow-release fertiliser which will feed the plants this season. In the spring, the couple will have to scrape off the top few inches of the soil and replace them with fresh compost and fertiliser. Always remember to firm in a top layer of gravel to help keep the water in and provide a more decorative finish.

When it comes to watering plants, I advocate hand-watering rather than using an irrigation system. By watering their plants themselves, Melanie and Paul are

seeing changes on a weekly basis and will be able to notice immediately if there is something wrong. Plants want to survive and signs of disease or lack of water will be clearly visible.

The couple are delighted with the finished result and feel that we have achieved our aims. "The garden is much more private," says Paul. "We used to feel so overlooked." Melanie is particularly pleased with the different sections. "It used to look small and uninspiring but now there are so many areas of interest." I couldn't agree more and it never ceases to amaze me how a small space can actually appear much bigger when more material is introduced. As Melanie and Paul have proved over the last few months, the key to achieving the garden of your dreams is to be bold and experiment with different ideas.

\* *Ann-Marie Powell* is appearing in *Real Gardens on Channel 4*. She is available for private commissions and can be contacted on 0181-255 8517.

