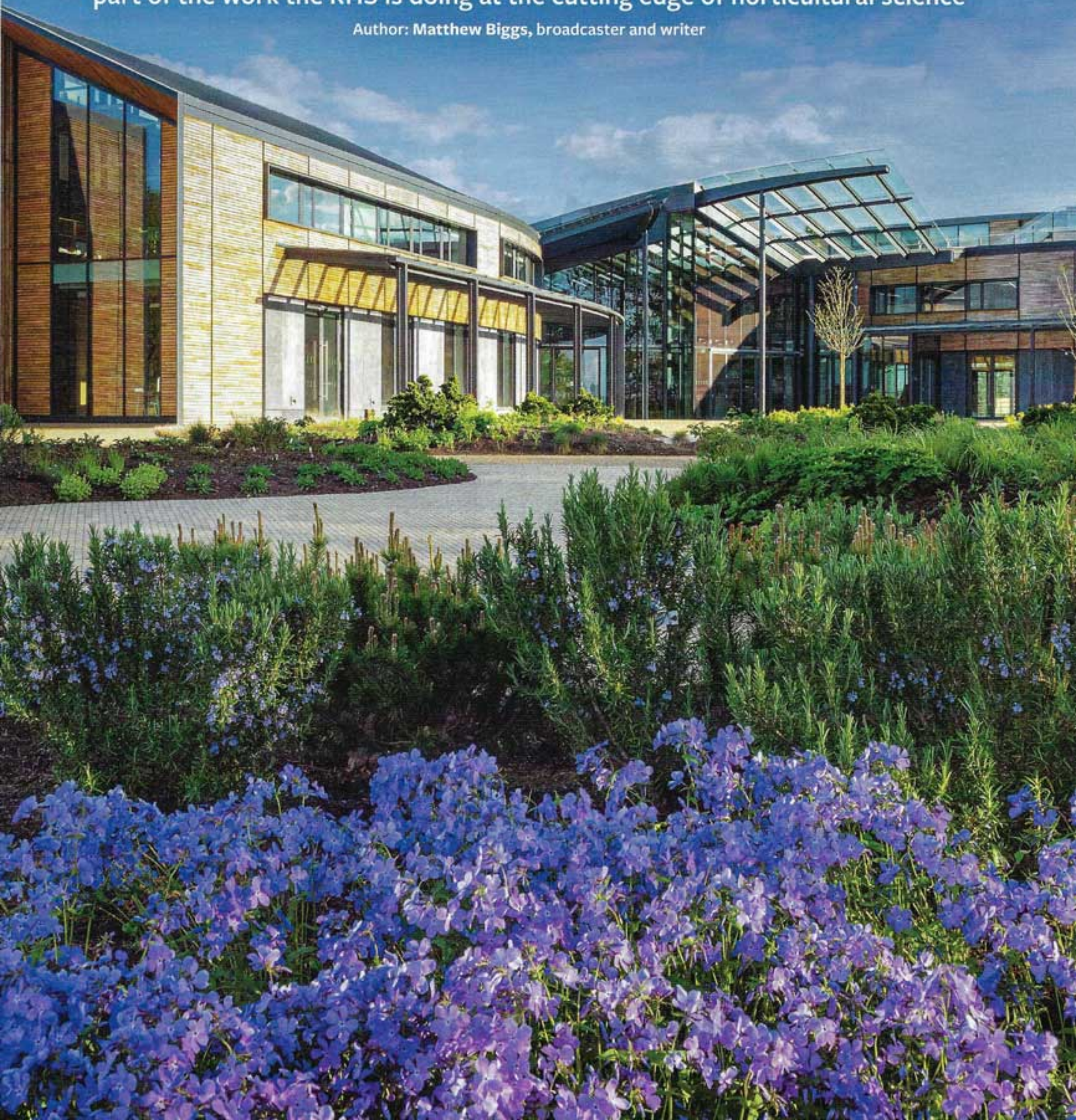


RHS Hilltop's glorious new gardens

RHS Hilltop – The Home of Gardening Science at RHS Garden Wisley, Surrey is surrounded by three new gardens: the Wellbeing Garden, World Food Garden and Wildlife Garden. Each one is innovative, beautiful and part of the work the RHS is doing at the cutting edge of horticultural science

Author: Matthew Biggs, broadcaster and writer



The Wildlife Garden

Designer: Ann-Marie Powell

Key purpose: welcoming nature

As gardens become increasingly important enclaves for wildlife, this new Wildlife Garden will perform a vital role in giving visitors to RHS Garden Wisley ideas and information, helping them reconnect with nature, and create homes for wildlife.

The garden will also contain a range of new habitats to improve biodiversity at Wisley, which is already home to a wide range of wildlife, from bat roosts to badger setts; moths have been studied here for decades. Biological records date back to 1891 – some 12 years before it was donated to the RHS.

‘The garden will contain a range of new habitats to improve biodiversity...’

The details

Concept: the Wildlife Garden covers 3,700sq m (nearly 1 acre) bounded by the Hilltop building on one side and pines on Battleston Hill on the other, proving that wildlife gardening is possible in dry shade. ‘Water of life’ is an all-embracing theme.

Layout and key plants: the garden is full of inspiring spaces of different sizes, planted with vibrant flowers and offering year-round interest, including masses of colour from bulbs. There are easily re-created examples of habitat creation such as log piles, green roofs, and wet, dry or shady growing conditions, a hide for birdwatching and feeders to attract birds. Beaches down into the wildlife pools allow children to pond dip, so they feel at one with nature itself. Low bridges give viewing from above, and long fingers of vibrant marginal aquatic plants protrude from the water. Planting includes *Foeniculum vulgare* (common fennel), *Orontium aquaticum* (floating arum), *Pontaderia cordata* AGM (pickerel weed) and *Ranunculus acris* (meadow buttercup).

Science behind the garden: this garden will profile a range of plants identified by RHS research as being Plants for Pollinators.

Special features: the garden will include a willow sculpture by Tom Hare with an insect habitat at its core.

Garden designer, Ann-Marie Powell

‘I decided that everyone gardens for wildlife, intentionally or not, and humans are part of that ecosystem but dominate it. As bees are so important, the design is based on a bee’s wing and the intricate shapes within.’



The Wildlife Garden has been designed to provide a range of habitats, with pools for aquatic creatures and pollinator-friendly planting.





Ann-Marie Powell has won two Gold medals at RHS Flower Shows.



In the World Food Garden visitors can see and learn about a diverse range of produce.

The World Food Garden

Designer: Ann-Marie Powell and the Wisley Edibles Team

Key purpose: to grow edible plants from all over the world

The World Food Garden will display fruit, vegetables and herbs grown together for the first time at Wisley. Fruit is an integral part of the history of both the RHS and Wisley. It was a central element of the early RHS Garden at Chiswick, and fruit selections painted by William Hooker (1785–1865) were invaluable in identifying cultivars as well as becoming treasured botanical works of art. The RHS was hugely influential in the 'Dig for Victory' campaign during the Second World War and since the 1950s fruit and vegetables were displayed in model gardens with large-scale fruit growing in the orchard. This whole flavour-filled garden is linked directly to a café area, providing a plot to plate experience.

The details

Concept: the World Food Garden covers 3,700sq m (nearly 1 acre). The planting is a collaboration between Ann-Marie and the RHS Garden Wisley Edibles Team who advised on practical crop selection to boost nutrition from fork to fork. The garden is divided into three sections round a central axis of a pergola dripping with cropping climbers, including vividly coloured squashes and an array of exotic passionflowers.

Layout and key plants: the Good to Grow area, based on AGM fruit and vegetable cultivars, is a traditional vegetable plot with recommendations and growing tips, highlighting easy-to-grow crops to inspire beginners. There are also burgeoning beds of herbs and edible flowers including *Hemerocallis*, hostas, lavender, mallow and mint. The World Maze features exotic crops that are staples of multicultural Britain, spilling from beds and clambering over arches. Look out for minutina (*Plantago coronopus* from Italy), achocha (*Cyclanthera pedata*, enjoyed in South America) and ajmud (*Carum roxburgianum*, from India).

Science behind the garden: this garden will celebrate the diversity of food and people who grow. It will share inspiration and expertise, and demonstrate the benefits of growing, cooking and eating, emphasising their importance in physical and mental health.

Special features: enclosing panels support 75 selections of trained fruit, including apples, pears, gages, nectarines and peaches. Here the team can display their creative skills in the spirit of friendly competition, inspired by intricate forms found in the Potager du Roi near the Palace of Versailles and the *Encyclopédie des forms fruitières* by Jacques Beccalotto (2010).

Ann-Marie Powell, co-garden designer

'The design, inspired by the vascular bundles in a monocot stem, allows the beds to be small and free-form, creating intimate spaces and quiet corners where visitors feel comfortable enough to take time to study the plants'.

Thank you

The RHS would like to thank the donors and funders who have generously supported the new gardens at Hilltop, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund. With their support these gardens have been created for all our visitors to learn in and enjoy.

