



KEY ELEMENTS

What Small, multi-tasking garden
Where Hampshire.

Special features Oversized planting scheme
viewed from a generous oak-boarded platform.
Size 200 square metres (25m x 8m).

Soil Sandy and acidic, but much worked.

Aspect East-facing.

Hardiness zone USDA 9.

Designed by Ann-Marie Powell
(ann-marielowell.com).



All things to all people

Designer, writer and presenter Ann-Marie Powell has managed to incorporate areas for relaxation, socialising and children's play into her own small plot

WORDS CAMILLA SWIFT PHOTOGRAPHS RACHEL WARNE

Ann-Marie Powell is an accomplished presenter and writer as well as a talented garden designer and landscaping expert. Her garden, practical, functional and beautiful, mirrors her passion for gardening, her infectious energy and wickedly throaty laugh. It may be small – “it’s just a suburban garden really” – yet she has made it work for everything she loves most in life: entertaining, gossip, children, chilling with a glass of wine.

Ann-Marie, her partner Jules, and their two sons, came in search of a bigger garden. She fell in love with the house because of the trees on the road, “amazing Scots pines”, and an abundant azalea by the front door. Here she has transformed a self-seeding dumping ground – her words – into an idyllic miniature woodland hideout. A low row of box balls, fugitives from a Chelsea show garden, planted about with *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*, *Deschampsia*, and ribbons of *Galium* line the front of the house, while a narrow path winds back towards

the leafy street, through a small area stuffed with bulbs – *Nectaroscordum*, *Crinum x powellii*, *Camassia leichtlinii* and *Eremurus* – all spiking through a lovely *Cornus kousa*, a fine *Eriobotrya* and a massive rhododendron. Bulbs are brilliant for a small space, she says, where up is the only way to go. Ann-Marie loves it here, this borrowed landscape with borrowed plants.

The back garden presented a bigger challenge. “Normal, sensible people do the kitchen or the electrics. We did the garden first.” With a brace of stalwart friends to help, Ann-Marie and Jules squared up to a mass of concrete rubble, a sharply sloping lawn, a gigantic leylandii hedge and a ropery retaining wall. They punched holes in the concrete before cladding it with oak board decking laid on massive sleepers, ripped out the leylandii, levelled the lawn, dug beds.

The garden has now settled into its skin. The oak decking, slightly gnarled and battered, has softened to a pearly grey. On either side of steps leading down to the lawn, sunken beds, instead of the ▷

Clockwise from left

Ann-Marie’s exuberant mix of grasses and perennials includes *Stipa gigantea*, *Sanguisorba* ‘Pink Tanna’ and *Verbena bonariensis*, with *Geranium Patricia* (= ‘Bremplat’) and *Teucrium hircanicum* ‘Paradise Delight’, all bursting out over silvery oak decking.

Echinacea purpurea among a haze of *Anemone leucophaea*.

Ann-Marie Powell sits against a backdrop of *Hemerocallis* and *Monarda* ‘Scorpion’.

Cosmos atrosanguineus and *Verbena bonariensis* mingle with *Stipa gigantea*.

Clockwise from top

A regiment of soon-to-be crimson sunflowers peer up to the deck from the garden below over buttresses of *Anemranthele lessoniana* and *Echinacea*.

The English oak table, home-made by Ann-Marie, complements the decking beautifully.

Looking up from The Sink past a wigwam of sweet peas to claret sunflowers and yellow *Coreopsis verticillata* 'Grandiflora'.

The lean-to workshop nestles at the side of the house and adjoins the decking through a tangle of relaxed planting.

▷ usual balustrading, act as buffers to the rest of the garden, where the tidy-minded Jules insisted on a nice rectangular lawn. Six *Sorbus aria* rise out of the narrow side beds and enormous plants wrestle for space. "Too many trees for this garden, really, but I love feeling enclosed."

"I've gone against the grain using huge plants in such a small garden," says Ann-Marie. *Rodgersia*, *Deschampsia flexuosa* and loads of *Veronicastrum* get really big, but make the most of vertical space. Across the bottom of the lawn runs a small, rectangular bed, crammed with *Stipa gigantea*. "Ace plant. I love it. Far too big. There were five; Jules made me remove two, but I replaced them with three *Calamagrostis brachytricha* when he wasn't looking." Here vegetables and perennials, *Calendula*, *Eschscholzia*, sweet peas, beans, sorrel, and *Verbena bonariensis*, jostling riotously, screen what she calls The Sink, "where we chuck the children", which miraculously accommodates a hammock, a trampoline,

an assault course and two large space hoppers, which can't be entirely beneficial for the borders. "I don't go for boringly indestructible childproof plants," says Ann-Marie, "but football is not allowed."

This garden looks wonderful in late summer: the grasses, with *Knautia*, *Echinacea* and lashings of *Verbena*, tower head-high. Ann-Marie loves *Lychnis*, *Hemerocallis* 'Summer Wine' and her red sunflowers, which look you in the eye when you're sitting on the deck. "I'm a bit of a Miss Havisham, really," she admits. "I like things slowly degenerating, rotting, floating off into the stratus."

The garden is where Ann-Marie feels most at home. "I love being outside. I eat breakfast here just to get that first injection of light and shade." She hankers after more space – a glass house, a vegetable garden. But this is what she can realistically manage for the moment, and as she says, creating a small garden on a tiny budget comes with its own disciplines and challenges. And as long as she's gardening, she's happy. □

Tips for small gardens

Ann-Marie Powell's expert hints on making the most of a limited space

- **Don't be afraid to use big plants in a confined area.** Make the best possible use of vertical space, and not just with climbers. Go for grasses such as *Deschampsia* or *Stipa*.
- **For engaging (not entirely gardening-enthusiastic) children,** use plants that are fun to grow and encourage wildlife – sunflowers work perfectly on both counts. Benches on Ann-Marie's deck are groaning with pots and baskets filled with tomatoes, basil, salads and strawberries, which her boys like to pick and eat. Down in the borders there are peas, beans and raspberry canes. The boys enjoy helping Ann-Marie hack back the grasses in spring.
- **Plan different places for different moods.** In Ann-Marie's garden the woodland area at the front of the house is for peace and solitude, the decking area is for entertaining and The Sink is a brilliant, enclosed play area for the children. Just no plastic swings, says Ann-Marie.
- **Pay attention to plant combinations.** Mix grasses with tall perennials for year-round interest: Ann-Marie's favourite plant combinations include *Eupatorium maculatum* (Atropurpureum Group) 'Orchard Dene' with *Miscanthus* and *Veronicastrum* with pretty much everything.





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