

Cascades of the beautiful ornamental grass *Hakonechloa macra* line a path through the shaded woodland area.

MODERN COUNTRY STYLE

Sense of BEING

Easy-to-navigate paths, striking viewpoints and soothing water features have created a sensory delight for a young wheelchair user and her family in this West Sussex garden

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When Ally and Roger Butler moved into their Victorian home in Slinfold, West Sussex, seven years ago, their plan for the substantial garden was to turn it into a space that they could enjoy with their son, Dan, aged 17, and their 15-year-old daughter Lucy, who uses a wheelchair.

The perfect time to put their ideas into action came in 2013, when the couple started renovations on the house, poolhouse and the drive. As the work progressed, they saw it as an ideal opportunity to transform the garden, too, linking everything together.

One of the builders recommended Ian Smith and Debbie Roberts of garden design business Acres Wild and, having looked at the duo's website and liked their use of bold planting groups, the Butlers asked them to take on the task. Their brief to Ian and Debbie was for a garden that was contemporary, but in keeping with the age of the house and suitable for Lucy. "Our main requirement was for it to be accessible for our daughter," says Ally. "As it was, the garden had lots of different areas that were difficult to get to."

Although they wanted Lucy to be able to use the garden throughout the year, the Butlers were keen that it should not look as though it had been created for a wheelchair user. "We wanted to have interesting things for Lucy to look at, such as water features, plants with colour and scent, and places for us to stop and enjoy," says Ally.

Ian also had to tackle practical considerations, such as making sure the paths were wide and that the various levels



TOP Soft cushions of *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' and the violet flowers of *Geranium 'Rozanne'* surround the bowl-shaped water feature. **ABOVE** A series of paths meander from the terrace to several points of interest, making the garden seem larger. **ABOVE RIGHT** By the pool, the planting is cool and calm, with the purple and blue tones of lavender, geranium and nepeta.

RIGHT A bespoke black basalt water feature adds sound and movement to the front garden, which is generously stocked with hostas and hydrangeas. **FAR RIGHT** Sweetly scented plants, such as pink *Rosa 'Gentle Hermione'* and white *Centranthus ruber 'Albus'*, ensure sensory stimulus for Lucy.



GARDEN GUIDE

Orientation The front of the house faces south.

Soil type Clay.

Special features Pool, poolhouse, water features and greenhouse.

Garden design Acres Wild, acreswild.co.uk.

TOP The back terrace is a tranquil place to eat and relax, with touches of formality provided by square beds delineated by box hedges.

ABOVE Lucy loves to visit the raised bed full of salads and vegetables, and the greenhouse, flanked by feathery fennel.

were linked without steps. Above all, the garden needed to provide different experiences. “We made sure that there were lots of points of interest,” says Ian. “There’s planting you can run your hands through, water features you can touch and then move on.”

The finished garden has aspects of formality and cottage style in equal measure and is in keeping with the house and the countryside, but there are also some modern twists. “Although it’s an English country garden, the manner in which the planting has been done gives it a contemporary feel, which we’re really pleased with,” says Ally.

At the back of the house is a generous paved area punctuated by trees edged in square box borders, then a stretch of lawn that sweeps around the house. There is also a vegetable garden, a shady woodland area and flower beds full of tactile plants, all accessible by gravel paths edged with ornamental grasses such as *Hakonechloa macra* and swathes of *Geranium ‘Rozanne’*.

“Lucy loves it,” says Ally. “She can pick lavender, and she can go into the greenhouse. We also have a raised bed with lots of salads and vegetables growing in it, and we can get to the pool now. It makes the garden so much more stimulating for her.”

With the family spending a lot of time at home, the garden has become a retreat, for Lucy as well as her brother and parents. “We wanted to be able to meander around different routes with her and now we can do just that. It’s perfectly suited to her needs, but it doesn’t feel as though it’s been designed just for her,” Ally says.