

Silver SPLENDOUR

With its lacy silhouettes of frosted trees and grasses rimed with sparkling ice, this Berkshire garden becomes a glittering wonderland in winter

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THE DETAILS

STYLE

English flower garden laced together with prairie-style planting

SEASONS OF INTEREST

All year, with special emphasis on winter and summer

SIZE

Two acres

SOIL

Mix of clay and chalk with huge amounts of rubble that have had to be dug out



THIS PAGE, TOP
Ghostly grey perovskia
stems give added
interest from within
a clipped box parterre
ABOVE Sarah Pajwani
in her winter garden
OPPOSITE Texture
and interest abound,
with bobbly *Phlomis
russeliana* seed heads,
soft, lustrous *Stipa
tenuissima* and bare
stems of *Cornus
sericea* 'Flaviramea'
giving an icy display

As fond as Sarah Pajwani is of her garden in summer, it is the pared-back beauty of winter that almost captivates her more. In June when the roses are in full bloom and the borders are bursting with cottage flowers, she admits that she can actually find it all a bit much. Winter, in contrast, is very calming. "The more you look, the more you see," she says.

Frosty weather brings a magical, ethereal quality to the scene. Sarah has skilfully incorporated layer upon layer of textural interest, working up in height from intricate seed heads at ground level, through arching mounds of grasses, to the supportive backbone of trees behind. With much of the colour scheme bleached and faded, the fascinating shapes and forms in this garden now come to the fore.

St Timothee, near Maidenhead, Berkshire, was akin to a flat field when Sarah and her husband Sal and sons Jonti and Jesse moved here in 2006. Sussex-based landscape design practice Acres Wild provided the plan for the framework and Sarah has been happily planting ever since, working border by border as time and budget has allowed.

The site is blessed with mature trees on the boundary – including a copper beech, white poplar, willows and a tulip tree to the east

and a glorious oak to the west. As the sun rises late and sets early in winter, their silhouettes during these potentially 'golden' hours are something for the family to savour. Nearer to the house, Sarah has populated the garden with smaller trees such as apples, pears, plums, crab apple and a purple-leaved prunus.

Part of the motivation for her planting schemes comes from looking out of the windows. The house was built in 1937 and has open views. "I'm a greedy gardener," Sarah says. "It really is important for me to have something to look at all year round. Even on a gloomy day, there should be something that catches the eye." Spare moments are well spent gazing, analysing and dreaming up tweaks that will improve the outlook. Having only gardened on a small scale before, Sarah embraced the challenge of this blank canvas with enthusiasm: "I was naive enough not to be scared. I decided to just do my research, choose plants that I liked and have a go."

Grasses have always been a mainstay. Sarah kept tearsheets when she was planning, and almost all featured grasses: "I think they knit the garden together and if you choose the right ones, they offer so many seasons of interest." Erect feather-reed grass *Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster' forms an efficient screen along a pathway. At this time of year, the stook-like clumps stand at about a metre high until severe winds or frost finally ►



"Even on a gloomy day, something should catch the eye"



Strong pops of colour come from the bare winter stems of dogwood

OPPOSITE Stone paths are lined with winter interest THIS PAGE *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' has been woven through the border to striking effect. Pruning in March helps keep its colour

knock them over. Then, after cutting to neat mounds by February, they put on 30cm-40cm of new growth within weeks. Even longer lasting is African feather grass *Pennisetum macrourum*, which has elegant, bristly flower panicles. Sarah regards it as one of the stars of the garden, as it can cope with the heaviest snow and still bounce back.

For structural interest, she has resisted planting too many evergreen shrubs, feeling they can look heavy. Instead, she has chosen handsome architectural perennials including *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*, ferns and Corsican hellebores to form strong elements in the winter scene. For scent, she has winter-flowering honeysuckle *Lonicera fragrantissima* and pink flowered *Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Dawn'.

A curvaceous wildlife pond is backed with clumps of pampas grass *Cortaderia selloana*, their feathery plumes catching slanting light

and bridging the visual gap between the tall trees and the pond. They work because they are in scale here, and because their dramatic shape and size provide a wonderful outline against the sky. Sarah keeps them tidy by giving them a haircut twice a year and by going in occasionally, wearing thick gloves to protect against the spiky leaves, and pulling out any tatty old growth.

Virtually the only strong pops of colour in this largely monochromatic winter scene come from the stems of dogwood, including *Cornus alba* 'Siberica'. Sarah has run a snaking S-shape of *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' through the main border and golden-green *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea' elsewhere, underplanted with bright yellow winter aconites. 'Midwinter Fire' is pruned every March, taking out one stem in three to the ground and reducing each shrub by a half, which helps to promote strong new growth and ►



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE The intricate seed heads of Greek oregano (*Origanum vulgare* subsp. *hirtum*) and sedum 'Carl' sit alongside one of Sarah's favourite grasses, *Pennisetum macrourum*; winter-flowering honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) provides a sweet scent; the slender stems of *Calamagrostis* x *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' stand tall

colour. Cutting back has to be staggered over the winter through to the end of February as time allows, and Sarah's policy is to leave anything that still looks good for as long as possible. She is happiest outdoors and spends at least 16 hours a week gardening. It is the time she puts in during winter that enables her (with the assistance of a gardener one day a week) to maintain such a large garden herself in the high season. "Attacking the weeds in February and March helps me feel vaguely in control as we go into summer," she says.

Sarah's initial brief to Acres Wild was for a garden that was natural, understated and easy to manage, and it is all that and more. Plant buying is always preceded by careful research to match plants to conditions and, as far as possible, she buys what she calls "my good bets", with the letters 'b', 'e' and 't' standing for 'beautiful', 'easy' and 'tough'. That makes a lot of sense for any gardener.

FOR MORE INFORMATION St Timothee, Maidenhead, Berkshire, is open for the NGS on Sunday 5 July 2020 and by arrangement between May and August for groups. Sarah also does walk and talk events, including one on 'The Winter Garden' on 15 January 2020. Contact pajwanisarah@gmail.com for details or see ngs.org.uk.

St Timothee

TOP TIPS FOR WINTER

- 1 When choosing new trees to plant,** consider their winter silhouette as much as their summer colour.
- 2 Select a few show-stopping grasses.** Fountain-like *Pennisetum macrourum* stands up well through winter.
- 3 Choose stems to give winter colour.** *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' looks like a bonfire even on dull days; *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea' has piercingly bright green-gold stems.
- 4 Consider the mid-height layer.** *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* keeps its shape and colour and provides architectural interest.
- 5 Fit gardening around your life.** Whether you have half an hour or half a day to spare, you can still achieve something.