

# A BRILLIANT PERFORMANCE

Big, bold and colourful winter planting invigorates more marginal areas of a large Surrey garden in a second, stage-stealing phase of design

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The autumn foliage of deciduous dogwood, *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire', drops to reveal spectacular orange and red stems



A massive, overgrown  
hedge was tamed to  
create the perfect  
foil for the vast,  
richly coloured  
planting that billows  
out from its base



## GARDEN GUIDE

**ORIENTATION** The north-facing Winter Garden is on the boundary of a five-acre, west-facing site.

**SOIL** Sandy loam, acidic.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

Winter border, flower garden, pool and entertaining area, vegetable garden, wild-flower meadow, tree house.

## GARDEN DESIGN

Debbie Roberts MSGD and Ian Smith MSGD, Acres Wild, 01403 891084, [acreswild.co.uk](http://acreswild.co.uk). The garden is not open to the public.

The white bark of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* glows above a colourful carpet of *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica', *C. sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire', golden-twigged *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea', barrenwort and Japanese shield fern



Siberian dogwood,  
*Cornus alba* 'Sibirica',  
forms a thicket of  
slender red stems,  
which deepen to a  
stunning shade of  
crimson in winter

"RATHER THAN ANY ONE  
SPECIFIC PLANT IN THE  
GARDEN, I LOVE PLANT  
COMBINATIONS – THE  
WONDERFUL INTERPLAY  
BETWEEN COLOUR,  
FORM AND TEXTURE"

Phase two of any garden design project is typically secondary to the main thrust of the garden landscaping and feverish planting that surrounds the immediacy of the house, swallowing budgets with ease. The somewhat neglected far corners of the garden can find themselves slightly abandoned, with their plight often exacerbated by their newly fashioned, flower-filled main counterparts.

This sprawling, five-acre garden epitomised this predicament. A decade ago, the new owners overhauled the Victorian brick-and-stone villa, while garden designer Debbie Roberts of Acres Wild was briefed to integrate the house with the more immediate garden area. The task was to create a more sociable space, with flower and vegetable gardens, a pool and outdoor entertaining areas, while opening up the breathtaking views over the Surrey Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.


The perimeters were initially overlooked. However, with the first phase in hand, plans were made for the creation of a north-facing Winter Border, vast in dimensions, striking in colour and with immense longevity. 'The planting starts to colour up from September as deciduous foliage drops and vibrant winter stems are revealed, cushioned by masses of textured evergreens. Interest intensifies, eclipsing the borders of the main gardens and remains captivating right through until March,' says Debbie.

The eastern end of this plant-laden spectacle – a border more than 50 metres wide, 10 metres deep and two metres tall – fuses with the 'cloud-effect' planting of the adjoining driveway. Mounds of mophead hydrangeas, with papery, desiccated heads, roll rhythmically between huge rhododendrons, upright magnolias, a sea of skimmia at their feet.

The sweeping Winter Border seemingly runs riot along the garden's far boundary. 'The design,

however, is precise and symmetrical,' reveals Debbie. 'The eastern-end of the border is aligned with the main sight line from the house, which centres on a pre-existing copper beech.' Anchored either side, there is mirror-image planting of three Himalayan birches and a Japanese maple, before the border sweeps away westwards, like a rampant bush fire, engulfing forest pine and silver birch in its wake. An established four-metre-tall hedge creates a handsome backdrop, a neat full stop to the broad vista. 'We reined in this massive, overgrown hedge to create the perfect foil to the vast, richly-coloured tapestry that sprawls at its feet,' explains Debbie. Large groups of plants were forklifted in to create swathes of bold, contrasting and interlocking colour, red dramatically juxtaposed with lime, orange set against darker shades of evergreen. Similar plants run in rich seams that split across the length of the border and rise in colourful bolts, ascending from thick-fringed edging to stiffer upright spines, front to back. This striking Mondrian-esque planting is shot through with the stark, white verticals of Himalayan birch, *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*.

The white-barked birches crisply dissect the rhythm of the vibrant planting beneath, while the softer, frosted tracery of ghost bramble, *Rubus thibetanus*, effectively feathers solid pools of stepped and colourblocked cornus, hard-pruning sharpening nature's height order. The tallest, most vibrant stems of blood-red Siberian dogwood, *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica', offer a bold spine of colour offset with a lower, more chaotic and irregular crackle of *C. sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire'. Highlights of lime-green *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea' bring contrast and complete a dashing palette that resounds across the entire border. Created almost as an aside, this tumultuous area steals centre stage in winter and maximises the full potential of a glorious year-round garden. 🌿



Clipped mounds of  
evergreen box, *Buxus*  
*sempervirens*, echo  
the shape of the hedge  
along the eastern  
boundary fence

“THE BRILLIANCE AND PERMANENCE  
OF THIS ONCE MARGINAL AREA  
ALMOST OUTSHINES THE SEASONAL  
SUMMER GARDENS. IT OFFERS  
COLOUR AND INTEREST FOR MORE  
THAN SIX MONTHS OF THE YEAR”



Dogwoods like *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' are relatively understated until the winter months when they burst into vibrant colour



Yellow or golden-twig dogwood *Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea'



Spiny, evergreen shrub leatherleaf mahonia, *Mahonia japonica* Bealei Group



The pale seed heads of *Hydrangea macrophylla* contrast with the colourful winter display beyond