

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

GARDENS

I L L U S T R A T E D

Spring stars

Top tips for creating a
dazzling tulip display

EXPERT INSIGHTS

Flowers and veg
slugs won't eat

A small garden that
looks good all year

Dan Pearson's 10
best plants for April

Easy veg

Grow your own
without weeding
or worrying

Green screen

How to make your
garden more private





IN BRIEF

What Small, semi-circular, city garden with year-round interest and a choice palette of woodland plants and trees.
Where West London.
Size 220 square metres with 150 square metres of planting.
Soil Free-draining loam over London clay.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

In April, the slate path along the front of Alister's house sparkles with magenta *Lunaria annua* 'Chedglow' and blue camassias appearing through young grasses under a canopy of *Halesia carolina* and the emerging blossom of *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy'.

A PLAN FOR ALL SEASONS

In making a garden for photographer Alister Thorpe, designer Stefano Marinaz was keen to ensure there would be something worth shooting every day of the year

WORDS NATASHA GOODFELLOW PHOTOGRAPHS ALISTER THORPE



How to make a garden that looks good every day of the year? This was the challenge facing designer Stefano Marinaz when garden photographer (and Stefano’s longtime collaborator) Alister Thorpe asked him to reimagine the plot at his west London home. “I’m always keen on year-round interest,” says Stefano, “but with this garden, I was very aware that the images Alister shoots might form part of his portfolio, and I wanted to give him something he found creatively inspiring.”

Alister had lived at the property for some ten years and, though he had a growing interest in plants and horticulture, he knew he needed a professional eye to get the most out of the space. The house occupies a corner plot and is surrounded by the garden on three sides, but these were laid out as separate areas – a struggling lawn, a linear York stone path running between raised brick beds, and a paved seating area – rather than a cohesive whole.

Thanks to the overhanging London plane trees, the garden is also very shady, but Stefano and Alister saw this as an advantage. “We agreed it should have a woodland feel with an immersive, engaging understorey planting scheme,” says Alister. “I was also keen that the garden felt connected with the house – but other than that I gave Stefano free rein. I’m a great believer that if

you employ somebody to do a specialist job, you give them as much freedom as you can.”

Stefano decided that the lawn should go and that a more meandering path would both soften the space and add interest, its curves and bulges hiding or revealing elements along its length. Corners and changes in direction are marked with multi-stemmed trees and shrubs – a key planting device in this garden. Several were pre-existing, including a fine magnolia, an amelanchier and a *Styrax japonicus*, but Stefano has added more to their ranks, choosing species with as long a period of interest as possible, or with such striking good looks that they will act as a focal point for a season.

In the first camp are *Acer palmatum* ‘Sango-kaku’, whose fresh green leaves turn yellow in autumn, leaving behind attractive, pinkish-red stems through winter; and *Halesia carolina*, which sports pretty clusters of nodding white flowers in spring, followed by unusual winged seedpods in autumn. *Hamamelis x intermedia* ‘Jelena’, *H. x intermedia* ‘Arnold Promise’ and *Chimonanthus praecox* fall firmly in the latter camp, stealing the limelight in the depths of winter. “Multi-stemmed trees are so good for smaller gardens,” says Stefano. “The growth is much more distributed and easier to manage than single stems where all the energy goes into that one trunk.”

For maximum interest, the garden has been planted in layers, starting with thousands of

Above On the east side of the garden, this seating area provides interest throughout the year. In March, the highlight is the blossom of two *Amelanchier x lamarckii*. Grasses such as *Sesleria* ‘Greenlee’ and *Deschampsia cespitosa* ‘Goldtau’ are cut back hard in late winter, allowing space for bulbs and self-seeders.

Right above By June the canopies of the deciduous trees have filled out, making this a pleasant, lush spot to sit. The burgundy-flushed leaves of *Cercis canadensis* ‘Forest Pansy’ become the focal point of this corner.

Right below *Hamamelis x intermedia* ‘Arnold Promise’ in the foreground goes largely unseen for much of the year, but steals the show in autumn, and then through winter when it comes into flower.



To continue turn to page 72 >



This image In May, the canopy of the London plane trees closes over the path that links east to west, where the fluffy, purple flowers of shade-loving *Thalictrum* 'Black Stockings' complement the cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* 'Ravenswing' and add contrast to the fresh-green leaves of the *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku'.
Left above In March, the amelanchiers come into flower and the east garden is filled with bulbs including summer snowflake *Leucojum aestivum* 'Gravetye Giant' and *Scilla forbesii* against the backdrop of the privet hedge.
Left below In autumn, the golden tones of an *Amelanchier x lamarkii* look stunning backlit and underplanted with *Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldtau'. The purple *Lunaria annua* 'Chedglow' flowers have now given way to silvery seedheads. The shrub against the house is *Rubus lineatus*, which has beautifully textured leaves.



▷ bulbs – cyclamen, *Iris reticulata*, *Eranthis* and camassias, for later in the year, as well as snowdrops replanted from Alister’s original garden. Above this sits a matrix of plants of which about 75 per cent are evergreen grasses and grass-like plants, including *Luzula nivea*, *Sesleria* ‘Greenlee’ and *Deschampsia cespitosa* ‘Goldtau’, the seedheads of which catch the light so beautifully in late summer and autumn. “The grasses we’ve chosen are compact and well-behaved so they cover the ground and give a naturalistic feel without blocking any views,” says Stefano, “and then the perennials and other plants can emerge through them.”

Those emerging include other long-lasting, interesting evergreen groundcovers such as *Epimedium* x *warleyense* ‘Orangekönigin’ and *Beesia calthifolia* with its glossy, marbled leaves and white flowers, alongside some real showstoppers guaranteed to catch the eye. *Cardiocrinum giganteum* from the Himalaya, which can grow to over 2m tall, is one of the earliest to appear. “Even before it flowers, it makes its mark with lush, green leaves that look like a giant salad among the grasses,” says Stefano. Next comes the foul-scented *Sauromatum venosum* with its spotted spathe; then various cobra lilies (arisaemas) and even Lady’s slipper orchids (*Cypripedium calceolus*) with their petals like twirled moustaches. “The arisaemas especially are an absolute joy,” says

Alister. “They stand proud in the morning light like the true performers they are.”

Self-seeders – particularly *Lunaria annua* ‘Chedglow’ and *Valeriana montana* – are encouraged, and climbers have not been forgotten either, with one wall demonstrating Stefano’s maximalist approach to a tee. Here evergreen shade-lovers *Lapageria rosea* (which flowers in our winter) and *Stauntonia latifolia* (spring-flowering) intertwine, providing two different seasons of interest in very little space.

These are sights Alister is looking forward to but, even if they take a couple of years to materialise, he relishes his increased connection with the garden. “Because of the year-round interest I’m out there almost every day tending to it,” he says. “What I love most is observing the incremental changes. While I’m always looking for attractive vignettes as a photographer, the garden is teaching me how to create them.” □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Heathfield Road, London W3.
Web ngs.org.uk **Open** For the NGS 6 July, 2-6pm.

Find out more about Stefano Marinaz’s work at stefanomarinaz.com

Stefano will be discussing this garden in one of his regular online masterclasses on 8 May at 7pm GMT. See Stefano’s website for details.

Above A path of stone setts cuts through the slate to the front door. A cup and saucer vine (*Cobaea scandens*), grown from seed, covers much of the front of the house. Beneath it is the striking foliage of *Chionanthus virginicus*, various arisaemas and a pot of pink nerines.

Right above An existing magnolia was retained on the west corner of the house, its three curled stems adding a sculptural element to the space. The flowers of *Hydrangea quercifolia* Snowflake (= ‘Brido’), which emerge in July, can be seen just behind it.

Right below The west corner of the garden is home to a table and chairs. Here, Stefano has used pots – some of them unplanted – as accents throughout the space, where they act as context for, or backdrops to, particular plants. In the foreground, *Tellima grandiflora* thrives in the shade.

