

The Garden



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June 2020 £4.95 rhs.org.uk

Borders with brilliance

Revisiting Morton Hall's striking plantings

Helianthemums for a sunny spot
Giant leaves for a touch of the tropics
Gardening from home: advice, projects and ideas



Surrounded by summer's finery

Having seen its spring beauty (see March 2019, pp38–43), a return visit to Morton Hall in Worcestershire rewards with clever, colourful plant combinations and wonderful vistas enhanced by this season's sunlight

Author: Stephen Lacey, garden writer. Photography: Clive Nichols

Pretty pastels
Sumptuous Summer Borders make effective use of repeated elements, such as lime-green *Nicotiana* and pink roses with blue and white *Echium* spilling over the paving.

Standing proud on its Worcestershire escarpment, Morton Hall enjoys enviably long hours of summer light. The red brick of the Georgian house, free of plant growth, makes a glowing centrepiece to the 3.2ha (8 acre) garden. To draw in the full drama of the views over the Vale of Evesham and distant Welsh Mountains, its owners Rene and Anne Olivieri added a two-storey window to their house.

I first visited in spring when the meadows surrounding the house were studded with early bulbs. The Stroll Garden and rock glade, which I described on my last visit (March 2019, pp38–43), were carpeted in *Narcissus* and *Scilla*. The rocks are now sporting drifts of tall campanulas. As summer progresses, white Japanese anemones, *Eurybia divaricata* (formerly *Aster divaricatus*) and oak-leaved hydrangeas take over, joined by the ice-blues of *Clematis heracleifolia* cultivars and the starry violet of *Eurybia x herveyi* (syn. *Aster macrophyllus* 'Twilight').

Summer sunshine

It is on the south- and west-facing sides of the house that the garden's principal summer compartments lie, and here shrubs and perennials can bask in sunlight.

The South Garden's borders perform over a long season, beginning in May with massed tulips, followed by peonies, alliums and the first flush of English and old-fashioned roses. 'The problem with many of these roses is they can be boring after flowering,' says Anne. She has an ingenious way of solving it. 'We plant clematis between the roses and, every February, we build wigwams of home-grown hazel for them to grow up. This takes their weight, so they are not sitting on the roses. The clematis then infiltrate their neighbouring roses, covering them in July flowers. Many roses then have a further flush, which often coincides with the clematis.'

This technique is well executed and creates some memorable pairings: among them white-flowered *Clematis* 'Prince George' growing through crimson *Rosa Munstead Wood* ('Ausbernard') AGM and claret C. 'Kermesina' AGM mingling with white R. Claire Austin ('Ausprior'). Repeat-flowering lilac *Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin' AGM also has an overcoat of C. 'Venosa Violacea' AGM. A hazel wigwam is woven around the trunk of each sentinel weeping silver pear, and pink C. 'Princess Diana' AGM despatched skyward. Some clematis are extracted from their hosts in autumn and tied in a loose knot until February, when they are pruned back with the roses. »

Early summer iris

Iris 'Crispette', a Tall Bearded cultivar whose sumptuous, delicate, pale violet petals with apricot bases emerge from darker purple buds.



Touched by sunlight

Misty morning sunlight kisses a lush border, with blue nepeta and *Allium christophii* AGM, grouped to the front with single-bloomed *Paeonia lactiflora* 'Krinkled White'. The back-drop of blousy, pink-toned old-fashioned roses includes (from left to right) *Rosa* 'Madame Isaac Péreire', R. 'Louise Odier' and R. 'Charles de Mills' AGM.



Rock with a cool theme

Sandstone steps rise through spikes of *Campanula latiloba* 'Hidcote Amethyst' (lighter blue) and 'Highcliffe Variety' AGM (darker blue) with a dash of white foxgloves.

Morton Hall Gardens

Redditch, Worcestershire B96 6SJ;
01386 791820; mortonhallgardens.co.uk

Location: on the crest of an escarpment, with views to the Malvern Hills and Wales.

Size: 3.2ha (8 acre) garden and parkland.

Age: Grade II-listed hall c1770 with later additions.

Garden style: areas of varying character set in a circuit around the house, from formal compartments, informal rock and water gardens to meadows further away from the Hall.

Open: check website for up-to-date visiting information and travel restrictions. Normally open by appointment only and for NGS.



Clever combinations

Owner Anne Olivieri has devised a useful way of covering old-fashioned roses after flowering by allowing the stems of later-blooming clematis to drift across while supported on hazel wigwams. Here, pale *Rosa* Madame Figaro ('Delrona') peeps from behind bold purple *Clematis* 'Venosa Violacea' AGM.



Fiery oranges and reds

A pleasing combination of orange *Crocosmia* 'Okavango', frothy bronze fennel and rich red *Dahlia* 'Karma Choc' AGM in the Middy Borders. The dahlias survive winter outdoors, under bamboo cloches stuffed with shreds of wood wool.

Inspired by golden hues

The South Garden retains its pastel colour scheme all season. As summer advances, agapanthus, echinacea, eupatorium, perovskia and phlox join the company, with an array of annuals that fill the gaps after tulips are lifted; grown from seed by Head Gardener Harry Green and his team, these include lime-green *Nicotiana*, cleome and purple zinnias.

Over the wall in the Kitchen Garden, the sun is the key inspiration for plantings. In the Sunrise Border, cosmos and salvias join rambler *Rosa* 'Goldfinch', *R.* 'Climbing Étoile de Hollande' AGM, and intersectional peonies to produce an array of pink, blue and pale yellow. The Sunset Borders sport the burnt colours of sunflowers, tropical *Ricinus communis*, heleniums and sumptuous, wine-red *Clematis* 'Royal Velours'. In the fiery core, the Middy Borders swelter in golds, oranges and red: calendula, rudbeckia, *Crocosmia* 'Hellfire' AGM and *C.* 'Okovango', with smouldering dark dahlias 'Chat Noir' and 'Karma Choc', both AGM.

From here, a step leads out to a small orchard and round to the West Garden, the most contemporary of Morton Hall's plantings, with sinuous borders of white, blue and black *Iris germanica*, sedums, verbena and agapanthus, with thymes and Mexican fleabanes growing among the paving.

And forever drawing your eye, across the ha-ha, is that arresting panoramic view: over the Vale of Evesham towards the Welsh Mountains – even more spectacular when lit, as it often is, by a fiery sunset. As Anne says, 'You feel you could walk from the kitchen into the heart of Wales.' ○

Fine views

Two of Anne's favourite white roses, *Rosa* Kew Gardens ('Ausfence') and *Crème de la Crème* ('Gancré') grow in the West Garden, which has fine views to the wider landscape.



Plentiful produce

Massed plantings of *Amaranthus hypochondriacus* 'Pygmy Torch' AGM and zingy orange *Tithonia* border the paths in the Kitchen Garden alongside the vegetables.

