

Front gardens guide



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Even keen gardeners often spend little time on their front gardens – yet we use them every day of the year. So here are three inspirational designs to help you make a welcoming green space out front

Words & illustrations
ANNIE GUILFOYLE

Country garden

When designing gardens, inspiration can be drawn from everything around you. In this country garden two of my favourite influences combine, with dashes of the garden at Great Dixter in East Sussex meeting the sublime 1950s textile designs of Lucienne Day. Not for the faint-hearted, as the colours are bold and brassy with pink, bright orange and hot yellow colliding together. The use of

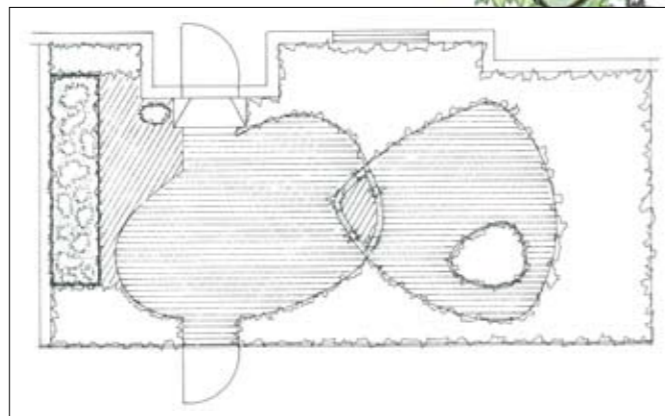
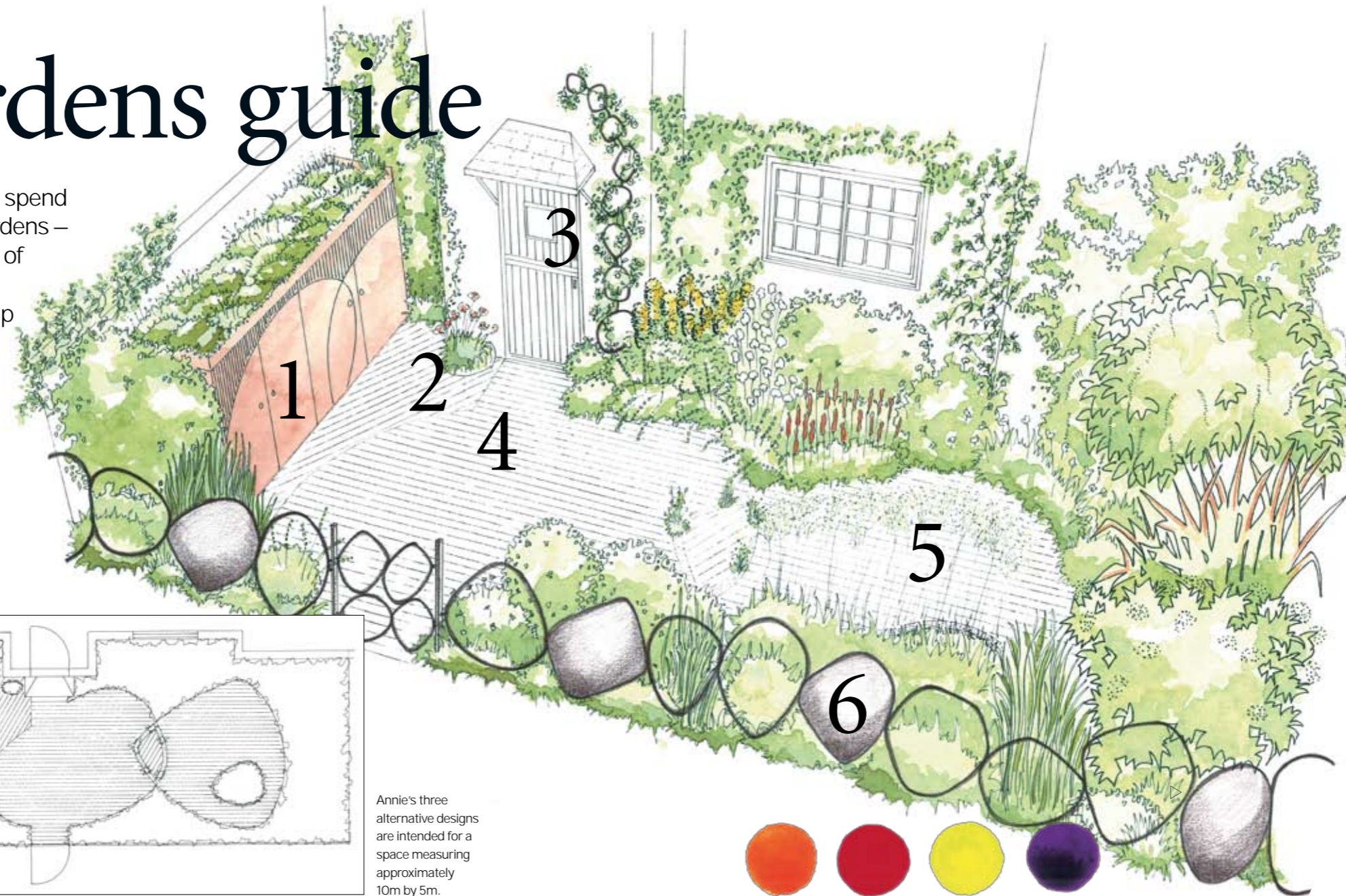


quirky railings and directional paving means it may not be everybody's cup of tea.

However, beyond the crazy colours I have selected some really outstanding plants that will command attention

and even possibly adoration. *Edgeworthia chrysantha* has lemon drops of flowers so richly scented in midwinter that it will uplift even the weariest soul. *Neillia thibetica* ensures the garden will be buzzing with bees and butterflies in early summer. Clematis are indispensable, perfect for providing vertical impact in confined spaces.

Most of the plants in this garden enjoy a moist but well-drained soil and with this in mind I have placed gravel strips between the junctions of the paving. This provides a perfect location for exciting seasonal treasures that require good drainage, such as *Tulipa acuminata*, *Rhodohypoxis deflexa* and *Crocus angustifolius*. These little gems will happily hold their own against the bolder plants, heralding the changes in season.



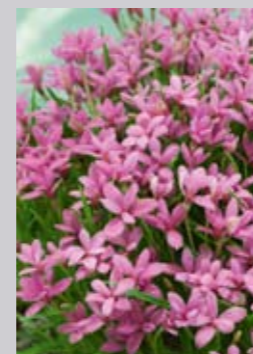
Annie's three alternative designs are intended for a space measuring approximately 10m by 5m.

- 1 Bin and bike storage**
This should be easily accessible from the house and gate. A green roof softens the visual impact. Planted with sedums, it requires little maintenance.
- 2 Doorstep planter**
Instead of using the doorstep planter to hide the door key, make more of it. It's the perfect place to have a moveable feast of seasonal bulbs or tender plants.
- 3 Plant support on the wall**
Conventional trellis can look dreary. This metal wall sculpture adds individuality and provides a stylish support for a beautiful rose.
- 4 Ramped paving**
New-build dwellings should comply with DDA regulations (Disability Discriminations Act), allowing for wheelchair access. Ensure that the ramp is non-slip by using textured stone.
- 5 Directional paving**
Use diamond-sawn sandstone cut in long lengths rather than rectangles. Change the direction of the paving or vary the width to create a subtle effect without looking too fussy.
- 6 A statement fence**
Forged iron railings inspired by 1950s textiles make a funky fence. It may not stop the dog escaping but it will stop passers-by in their tracks.

Key plants for a country garden



Allium cristophii
Alliums are generally easy to grow. Heralding early summer, these large purple orbs look wonderful when punctuating the border. Magnificent seedheads follow.

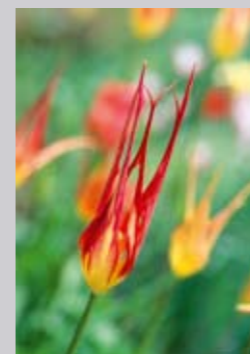


Rhodohypoxis deflexa
I first saw this at Keith Wiley's extraordinary Wildside garden in Devon, where I was captivated by its jewel-like qualities. It won't tolerate extreme wet winter weather.

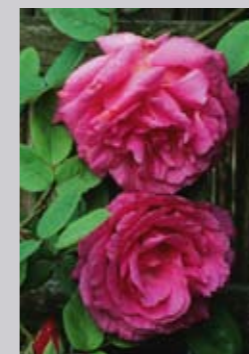


Crocsmia x crocosmiiflora 'Babylon'
Great plants are often maligned. The leaves emerge early and it flowers all summer in a mouth-watering mix of bright orange-red with a brownish centre.

From right to left: heather.edwards/gapphotos, oscar.darcy/gardenworld, images.visions/gapphotos, no.ward.lee/gettyimages, johnglover/gapphotos, visions/gapphotos



Tulipa acuminata
The most exquisite of all the species tulips. An elegant flower with sharply pointed petals of red and yellow. You will understand why it's called the fire flame tulip.



Rosa 'Zéphérine Drouhin'
A stunning pink climbing rose which is very popular due to the lack of thorns. Richly scented, it will tolerate light shade but does a need good air circulation.



Crocus angustifolius
It's easy to think of crocuses as a bit old-fashioned, but they offer a splendid show of spring colour. This scented species is a rich gold, flushed with mahogany stripes.

Planting options

Bold and vibrant colours

- *Geranium psilostemon*
- *Rhodohypoxis deflexa*
- *Helianthemum 'Henfield Brilliant'*
- *Echinacea 'Art's Pride'*
- *Euphorbia myrsinites*
- *Clematis 'Jackmanii'*
- *Berberis thunbergii 'Pow-wow'*
- *Agastache 'Tangerine Dreams'*

Show-stopping bulbs

- *Tulipa acuminata*
- *Nectaroscordum siculum subsp. bulgaricum*
- *Tulipa 'Cayenne'*
- *Allium cristophii*

Great for green roofs

- *Sempervivum arachnoideum*
- *Sedum spurium*

Roses

- *Rosa 'Zéphérine Drouhin'*
- *Rosa 'Madge'*

Plants to make the neighbours stop and stare

- *Edgeworthia chrysantha*
- *Clematis 'Vince Denny'*
- *Rhaphiolepis indica*
- *Neillia thibetica*

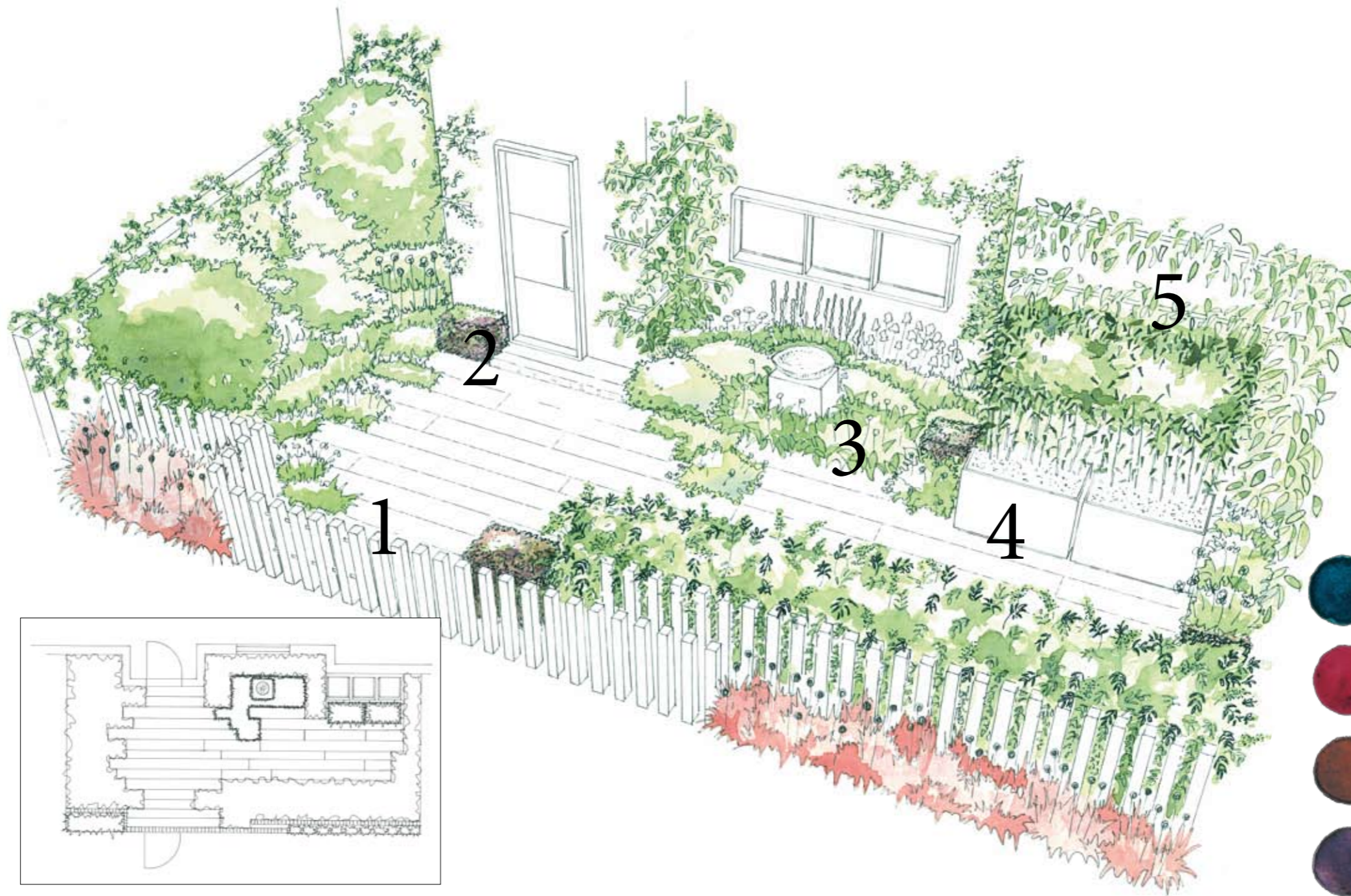
Town garden

Architect Carlo Scarpa's work is a subtle blend of minimalism and exquisite detailing. His collaboration on the Monument to the Partisan Women in Venice (pictured below) is one of his most powerful and intriguing pieces of work. Low tide reveals a woman's body clambering to safety over a series of



stone blocks. The asymmetry of Scarpa's composition has inspired the layout of this town garden. Staggered stone paving accentuates the plot's width, and plants are encouraged to reach into the space. Simple, linear fencing echoes the paving pattern and allows glimpses into the garden. In this shady space the structural plants are evergreen, so it will look vibrant throughout the year. The colour palette is limited, using earthy tones that complement each other well. Scent is a major player, with *Daphne bholua* 'Alba', *Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis* and *Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Purpureus' all providing sweet perfume during winter and well into spring.

Practically any shrub can be used to form a hedge. For this garden I have chosen the best-behaved shrub in the world, *Nandina domestica*. It maintains an elegant shape without taking over the garden. An unusual hedge with textural foliage, it looks stunning – and no trimming required. The bins are screened behind two containers planted with bamboo (*Fargesia murielae*).



planting & design solutions

1 Asymmetrical wooden fence
Individual posts are set into concrete. Cut at different heights, and overlap or stagger some sections to accommodate low planting on the pavement side. The shadows cast add another dimension to the design.

2 Evergreen blocks
Purple or brown evergreen foliage is extremely hard to find. However, *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb' looks wonderful when clipped into a cube shape and provides a cunning change from box.

3 Water feature
The best way to attract birds into the garden is by providing water, be it a simple bowl or an artist-made vessel. Ensure it is clearly visible from inside the house to enjoy the view.

4 Planters on wheels
Hide the dreaded wheelie bins by using planters on wheels. These are easy to move when the bins have to be put out. Make them from wood or metal, or simply fit wheels to an existing planter.

5 Plant supports
Metal strips set off the wall allow space for air to circulate around the climbers. Paint in dark colours if you want them to disappear or choose a bright colour to make a statement. Varying the lengths will emphasise the asymmetrical design. ▶



Key plants for a town garden



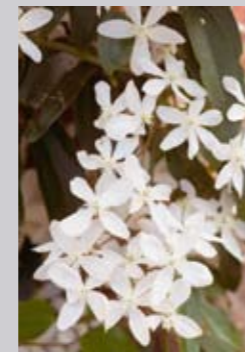
Akebia quinata
A gorgeous climber that needs plenty of space. Richly coloured, chocolate-scented flowers are often followed by intriguing fruits. Attractive, semi-evergreen foliage.



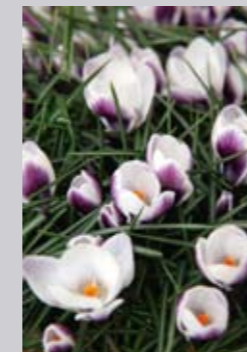
Physocarpus opulifolius 'Diabolo'
One of my favourite deciduous shrubs with stunning rich, dark brown foliage and delicate pink flowers in early summer.



Athyrium niponicum var. pictum
Ferns are under-used in gardens. This is one of the prettiest, with painted leaves of silver-green and soft purple. Resist it if you dare!



Clematis armandii
An evergreen that can be vigorous once established. With superbly textured leaves and vanilla-scented flowers in late winter, it will grow happily on a shady wall.



Crocus 'Prins Claus'
A beautiful crocus with an alluring colour combination of white petals and a dark purple streak on the outer side. This regal plant will change your mind about crocuses forever.

From right to left: neil nollmes / gapphotos; friedrich strauss / gapphotos; mariannemajerus; nell mcdarind / alamy; martin hughes-jones / gapphotos; victoria frimston; carole drake / gapphotos; mark win wood / gapphotos



Daphne bholua 'Alba'
Queen of the daphnes. This is possibly the best shrub you will ever plant in your front garden – a compact evergreen that has a winter scent like no other plant.



Fargesia murielae
It is the finely textured leaves that make this clump-forming bamboo so attractive. For those who have a fear of using bamboos, this is a good one to start with.



Nandina domestica
This essential evergreen is possibly at the top of my top-ten shrubs list. Delicate foliage and in most years sprays of white flowers followed by berries.

Planting options

Evergreen structure with burgundy/brown foliage

- *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Atropurpureum'
- *Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Purpureus' (foliage flushed purple when young)
- *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb'

Good for shade

- *Pileostegia viburnoides*
- *Epimedium x cantabrigiense*

Long season of interest

- *Astrantia major* 'Ruby Wedding'
- *Geranium Rozanne* (= 'Gerwat')
- *Nandina domestica*

Sweetly scented

- *Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis*
- *Daphne bholua* 'Alba'
- *Clematis armandii*
- *Phlox paniculata* 'David'
- *Narcissus* 'Petrel'

Notable climbers

- *Akebia quinata*
- *Clematis* 'Frances Ravis'
- *Clematis viticella* 'Flore Pleno'
- *Clematis* 'Betty Corning'

Coastal garden

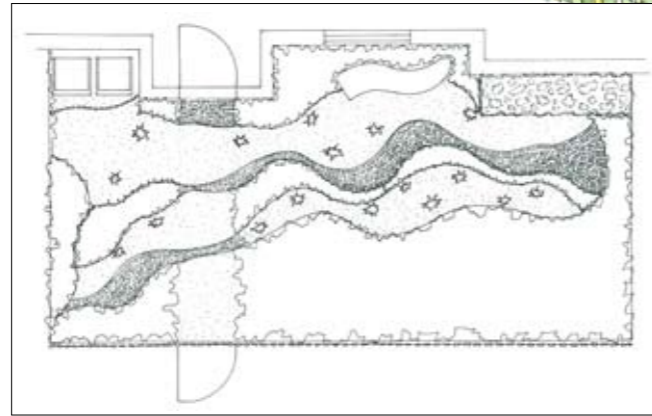
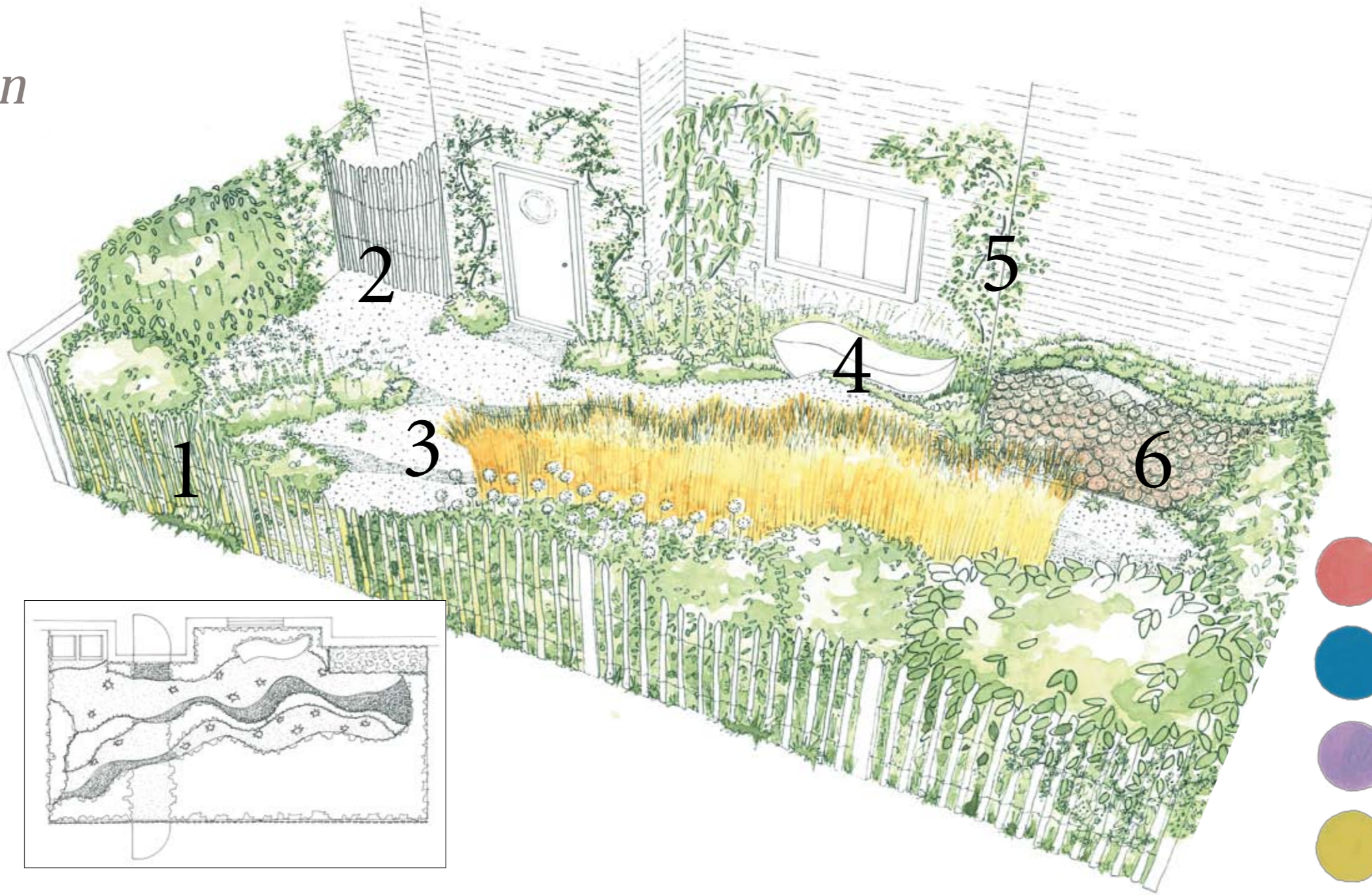
▷ Thomas Heatherwick's wave-shaped East Beach Café in Littlehampton is the inspiration for this coastal garden. Coastal gardens are generally less prone to severe frosts, but wind and salt-laden air can cause problems. Wind is probably one of the most destructive elements in the



garden, rocking plants and destabilising roots. It lessens the plant's ability to obtain nutrients and water. When selecting plants, choose ones that originate from coastal or exposed areas and ensure they are planted firmly to avoid wind-rock.

The fluid shapes of poured concrete combine with stones set on edge, forming a sinuous ground pattern that weaves through the drifts of plants. Swathes of loose gravel allow the vagrants such as *Acaena inermis* 'Purpurea' to self-seed. Undulating waves of *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' intermingle with *Echinops sphaerocephalus* 'Arctic Glow'. These statuesque perennials will sway in the breeze, continuing well into autumn and sometimes even early winter.

Shades of seascapes and sultry skies reflect in the planting palette with silvers, blues, purple-pinks and buttery yellows. These plants will relish the sunny site and free-draining soil but will happily tolerate the salt-laden air. *Armeria maritima* 'Rubrifolia' covers the wood store, forming hummocks of purple foliage dotted with pink flowers.



planting & design solutions

1 Chestnut paling fence
Traditional and sustainable. Design it specifically for your garden; in this case undulating waves echo the coastal theme.

2 Screening the bins
If you have a recess that is easy to screen off, why not position the bins there. Make the screen out of chestnut paling so it links seamlessly with the front fence.

3 Concrete
Excellent for creating flowing shapes. Inset with stones laid on edge to form ribbons that ebb and flow across the garden. Pebbles or shells can be used for additional colour and texture.

4 Seat
For some reason putting a seat in the front garden is not the done thing, but why not? Make it from found objects such as driftwood and boulders or commission a designer to create something unique.

5 Plant supports
Replace the common or garden trellis. Commission a blacksmith to make something inspiring. It can be made to fit your walls perfectly and suit the plants that you intend to grow.

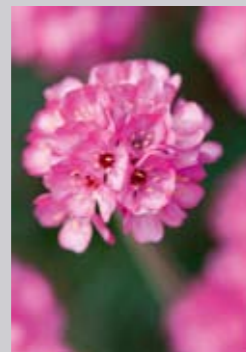
6 Wood store
Easy access to the house and a dry location are important. If your garden faces a prevailing wind, you may need a roll-down cover to keep the wood dry. □



Key plants for a coastal garden



Agapanthus 'Gayle's Lilac'
Everyone likes *Agapanthus* but not everyone grows a lilac-coloured one. This beauty is a bit *different*, which makes it desirable. Half-hardy and heavy-flowering.



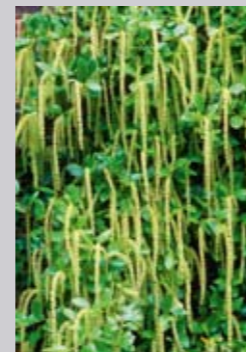
Armeria maritima 'Rubrifolia'
Sea thrift is one of our prettiest coastal plants. This one has bronze foliage dotted with pink flowers in spring and early summer. It may look delicate but it's a toughie.



Echinops sphaerocephalus 'Arctic Glow' A statuesque perennial with all the attributes of blue globe thistles, except that these are a stunning silvery-white. Bees and butterflies thrive on it.

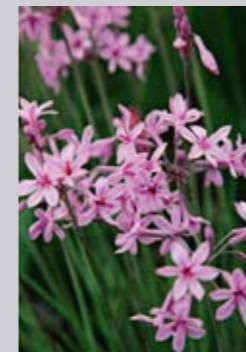


Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster'
A tall, upright grass with striking straw-yellow stems. It holds its shape even in the windiest places and maintains its form well into the winter.



Itea ilicifolia
A perfect evergreen wall shrub for a sheltered spot. It bears long, honey-scented flower racemes from midsummer, every other year in some gardens.

thomas heatherwick cafe / the eubulbous / alamy. plant portraits from right to left: martin hughes/jones/garden World images/flowerphotos/alamy geoffr du feu/gap photos/nicola browie/gap photos/ho ward rice/getty images/martin hughes/jones/gap photos



Tulbaghia violacea
Scented star-like flowers held on elegant stems make this a desirable addition to the garden. Garlic-smelling leaves can help to repel pests such as aphids and slugs.

Planting options

Unusual shrubs

- *Olearia x mollis* Cockayne 'Zennorensis'
- *Itea ilicifolia*
- x *Rhaphiobotrya* 'Coppertone'
- *Lonicera syringantha*
- *Myrtus communis* subsp. *tarentina*
- *Artemisia abrotanum*

Wind-tolerant perennials and grasses

- *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'
- *Libertia* 'Taupo Blaze'
- *Eryngium giganteum* 'Silver Ghost'
- *Armeria maritima* 'Rubrifolia'

- *Echinops sphaerocephalus* 'Arctic Glow'

Climbers

- *Sollya heterophylla*
- *Holboellia coriacea*

Ground cover

- *Pittosporum tobira* 'Nanum'
- *Acaena inermis* 'Purpurea'
- *Thymus* 'Porlock'

Bulbs

- *Allium unifolium*
- *Tulbaghia violacea*
- *Allium stipitatum* 'Mount Everest'
- *Tulipa* 'Apricot Beauty'

Law in the front garden

Planning permission is required:

- When paving an area larger than five square metres using non-permeable paving.
- If constructing a wall or fence more than 1m high, when adjacent to a public highway or footpath.
- With a listed house or if the garden is within the curtilage of a listed building.

Planning permission is not required:

- When using permeable paving or allowing water to run off into a lawn or border.

