

Chelsea Flower Show



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▲ The NI Garden Centre celebrated autumn in this Houseplant Studio

► The Trailfinders 50th Anniversary Garden won Gold for Jonathan Snow's evocation of the Himalayas

▼ The Best Show Garden award went to the Guangzhou Garden, designed by Peter Chmiel with Chin-Jung Chen



TRAILFINDERS SHOW GARDEN – GOLD MEDAL



GUANGZHOU CHINA – BEST SHOW GARDEN

A reason many of the gardens are more muted in colour than they might have been is that their plant content was fixed (and paid for) in expectation of a Chelsea held in May. Jonathan Snow's Trailfinders' Garden, an evocation of the Himalayas at an altitude of 6,500ft-13,000ft, would have looked very different had his large, dominant, pink-flowered rhododendrons been in bloom. Probably they would have been visible from Battersea Power Station. Instead, they are green and shadowy, and his garden has gained mystery and atmosphere because of it.

In fact, it is quite magical ducking through their exposed trunks to discover water trickling over rocks and flowing in rills across stone paths, and to enjoy the patterns of creeping rubus, hairy *Bergenia ciliata* and other ever-green foliage on the slopes. I love this sort of exotic woodland gardening, and I am freshly inspired to add more late-flowering eye-catchers among my own ferns and hellebores – especially the

broad-leaved roscoeas, yellow *Cautleya spicata*, and hedychiums (all from the ginger family) on display here, which have such presence and panache. Apart from hydrangeas, the shady parts of many gardens are pretty quiet at this time of year, and they don't need to be.

Scrumptiously scented, and dodgily hardy, *Hedychium gardnerianum* is the species featured in the Trailfinders' Garden, but there are more varieties inside the Great Pavilion on the Plant Heritage exhibit. Manning it is Andrew Gaunt, who works for Defra by day and tends his national collection of 250 different sorts of hedychium by night – well, evenings and weekends.

He tells me that two of the best and hardiest species for semi-shade are *H. forrestii* and *H. spicatum*, so that is where I shall start.

THE GREAT PAVILION

The Great Pavilion is nowhere near as full as normal this Chelsea, and it is odd

not seeing the massed tulips or catching the scents of David Austin Roses. But there are still some miraculous apparitions. Alliums in September – you can't be serious!

Tom Brown of West Dean was marvelling at the quality of the plants on the Raymond Evison Clematis stand. This is a tour de force, and in contrast to most of the gardens outside, such a blast of colour. All his selections are compact and repeat-flowering, his latest being an intense purple called 'Duchess of Cornwall'. It is a good one, but my eyes keep returning to 'Nubia', a sumptuous crimson-red.

Medwyn's of Anglesey has notched up a 13th gold medal, but Medwyn says he is getting old and this may be his last show. I think he has said that before. Curly 'Medusa' kale and Spanish black radish feature among the 43 types of vegetable on display. "Naked veg are more colourful than flowers," he declares. On the same tack, I enjoy the idea of herbs and other edibles for graz-