

# Sum of the manse

For this walled garden on the edge of the Cairngorms, designer Jonathan Snow has created a sloping parterre filled with flowers and food

WORDS ANNIE GATTI PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

## IN BRIEF

**Name** Coldstone House.  
**What** Traditionally planted walled garden of a Scottish manse.

**Where** Aberdeenshire.

**Size** Walled garden is

about one acre.

**Soil** Heavy soil, improved

with organic matter.

**Climate** Cold winters

and dry summers.

**Hardiness zone** USDA 7.

The semi-circular parterre is enclosed by the arc of the curving, lime-mortar-rendered, granite wall. Its three planting zones are linked by grass paths that lead through rose- and clematis-covered arches and past borders where tall and airy plants *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Lavendelturm', *Gillenia trifoliata* and *Cephalaria gigantea* rise above clipped evergreen hedging and the yellow froth of *Alchemilla mollis*.



## KEY PLANTS

### 1 *Delphinium Black Knight Group*

Stylish addition to a cottage-garden scheme with stately spires of deep-blue flowers with black eyes. Loved by pollinators. Height and spread: 1.7m x 75cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-7b.

### 2 *Cephalaria gigantea*

A wonderful scabious to add height and colour, with airy stems holding pale-yellow flowerheads above aromatic foliage. 2.5m x 1m. RHS H7, USDA 3a-7b.

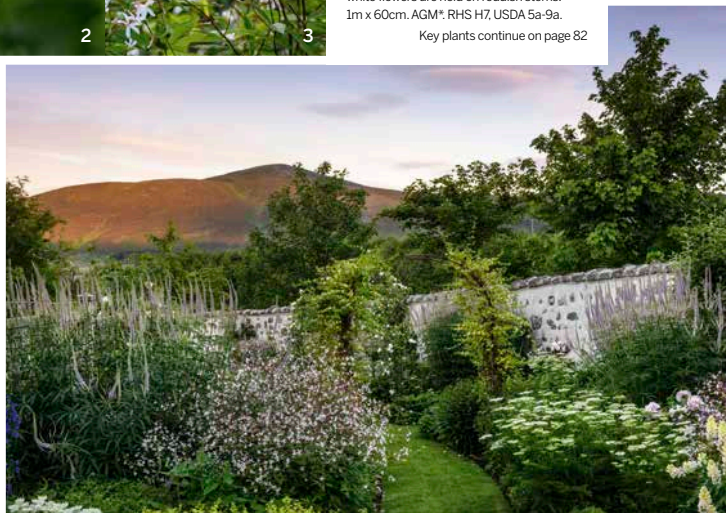
### 3 *Gillenia trifoliata*

A great plant for creating a light, airy effect in light shade or in sun. The sprays of starry white flowers are held on reddish stems. 1m x 60cm. AGM\*. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9a.

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**Top** Dry-stone walls, which are a feature of the surrounding farmland, separate the manse house from the property's outbuildings. Existing maple trees have been retained as they provide a mid-height link to the mature trees beyond.

**Right** The wall, which is approximately three metres high, provides shelter for the planting but still allows for borrowed views of the mountain Morven. The first metal arch here is festooned with honeysuckle, with a further arch, supporting *Rosa City of York* (= 'Direktor Benschop'), marking the path junctions at the top of the parterre.



When Jonathan Snow was commissioned to design the garden of a former Scottish manse on the edge of the Highlands, he discovered that the owners wanted two very different approaches: simple and unadorned in front of the house, and full and romantic at the back.

The solution for the front, which has open views across sloping fields and forestry plantation to low hills on the horizon, was clipped yew balls that grounded the white house, calming grass areas and gravel paths.

The back garden slopes up a grassy hill to a striking three-metre-high wall, which arcs in a semi-circle, sheltering the garden and forming its northern boundary. "The owners wanted to grow vegetables and cut flowers. They wanted reasons to walk round the garden, with places to sit, and they wanted the planting to be appropriate to its location," explains Jonathan. A visit with his clients to the Arts and Crafts garden at Crathes Castle established that borders edged with

clipped evergreen hedging and filled with traditional herbaceous planting would work well at the manse.

The back garden is dominated by a tennis court, and hidden from the house behind an existing double line of clipped beech hedging. To create journeys through the space, Jonathan designed a series of planted walks around the tennis court. A curved path that led from the entrance of the back garden directly to the tennis court has been transformed into a delightful walk through an orchard of apple and filbert trees, which is spangled with narcissus, fritillaries and camassias in spring.

The space between the two rows of beech hedges is now filled with rhododendrons, camellias and hydrangeas, providing bursts of colour in spring, summer and autumn. This area gives on to an expanse of grass beneath three established *Sorbus* trees, where the family can play games, and leads to another route past a new border of shade-loving shrubs and perennials to a heather-thatched summerhouse. It is similar to the traditional folly at Braemar Castle, and provides a resting spot half way up the garden. Beyond this is the parterre flower garden, with two more seating places to

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**Above** The blue of *Campanula persicifolia* and white of *Lupinus 'Noble Maiden'* add a freshness to the upper borders, which are divided from the cut-flower borders by oak trellises. The heather-thatched summerhouse in the background is modelled on a traditional fog hut folly.

The bright blue of *Delphinium* Black Knight Group creates a striking contrast with the yellow flowerheads of *Alchemilla mollis* and subtly blends with the mix of pinks and whites that includes *astrantias* ('Roma', 'Large White' and 'Star of Billion'), foxgloves, lupins and *Rosa Scepter'd Isle* (= 'Ausland'). The tall, lime-mortar-rendered wall is a common sight in this area. Known as 'auld stane dykes', they were traditionally used to seal out water.

## Evolution of a garden

"Chemistry and collaboration make for a much better garden in the long run," explains Jonathan, highlighting how the ultimate success of any garden project relies on the owners committing to a good level of ongoing garden maintenance. It can often be a frustration for designers if there is the expectation that a garden will look after itself once the designer has gone. "A garden evolves," says Jonathan. "It's been said that a garden designer only gets you about half way to a decent garden. How it is looked after in the years after the designer leaves, will ultimately determine its success." At Coldstone, Jonathan is delighted by the ongoing relationship between himself as the designer, the clients and gardener. "This is a plant-heavy garden and the relationship between the three of us is the most important one here."



## MORE KEY PLANTS

### 4 *Echinops ritro* 'Veitch's Blue'

An attractive globe thistle with blue flowers that is visited by hordes of insects. 90cm x 45cm. RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.

### 5 *Rosa Scepter'd Isle* (= 'Ausland')

This shrub rose produces numerous fragrant, semi-double, pale-pink flowers from summer through to autumn. 1.2m x 75cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-10b.

### 6 *Veronica virginicum* 'Lavendelturm'

A great plant for adding height to a border, with spikes of pale-lavender flowers from July to September above deep-green leaves. 1.5m x 45cm. AGM\*. RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.

\*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.  
\*Hardiness ratings given where available.

**Top** The sheltered terrace at the side of the house enjoys uninterrupted views of the rolling landscape to the southeast. Yellow rattle has been added to the areas of long grass to allow wildflowers to become established.

**Right** The planting between the restored barns is a calming combination of clipped yew forms and multi-stem *Prunus* 'Accolade'. The barns have been finished with the same pale render as the semi-circular garden wall on the slope above them.



▷ enjoy the views. Jonathan's design for the top section includes multiple routes to the seating area at the base of the wall, which shapes the garden into a squashed semi-circle. "The idea came to me to create a series of access paths at different angles, like the spokes of a wheel." He divided the space into three zones – bottom, middle and upper – with the planting in each one a combination of plants for spring, summer and autumn.

The bottom zone consists of two long beds, which sit either side of a box-edged curved bed filled with a mix of shrubs, perennials and bulbs. The shrubs, Jonathan explains, create a visual link to the ones he has incorporated in the borders around the tennis court. The middle zone is an arc of four beds, with the two outer ones filled with fruit and vegetables, and the inner ones with stands of cut flowers.

As the cut-flower beds are at the heart of the parterre, it is important they look good all through the growing season. "They are planted in lines so that they sit comfortably with the adjoining vegetable beds." Generous plantings of annuals, bulbs, including tulips and alliums, and perennials, such as peonies, astrantias, echinops and roses, ensure the beds don't look gappy

once stems are picked. A line of oak trellising forms a secondary arc parallel to the wall, creating a subtle division between the top of the vegetable and cut-flower beds and the bottom of the four upper zone beds on either side of the top grassy path. Here, metal arches planted with roses, honeysuckle and clematis mark the junctions between paths, and yew pyramids frame the top seating area. Fruit trees, including plum, quince and pear, are trained against the south-facing wall.

Although May and June can be surprisingly chilly this far north, and winter temperatures can plummet to -15°C, the protection afforded by the wall and Jonathan's choice of hardy plants means that in midsummer the beds are a lush medley of roses, peonies, delphiniums, campanulas and veronicas. By early October, it's sedums, geraniums, anemones and *Thalictrum delavayi* that reward journeys to the top of the garden. Then the garden rests until the first bulbs emerge again in early spring. □

## USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Jonathan's work at [jonathansnowdesign.co.uk](http://jonathansnowdesign.co.uk)

**Above** Clipped box hedges surround beds filled with vegetables including lettuce and kale, and cut flowers, such as cosmos, xerochrysom and sweet peas, which climb up a hazel support framework.