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a wilder garden

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## a wilder garden

Gardens have always been about our relationship with nature and the wild world. When people saw the wilderness as a threat, gardens were structured and formal. As we took control of the world about us and imported exotic species from all corners of the empire, gardens became a hysterical miscellany of bigger, better and more colourful species. There has always been an aesthetic argument for simplicity, making a garden a place for quiet and contemplation of unmanaged nature. Now, when there is no unmanaged nature...

The use of wild species and garden plants that can look after themselves is not particularly popular in the UK. Something to do with a protestant work ethic, perhaps? In fact, it takes considerable gardening skill to allow plants to seed themselves and mingle in a tapestry of textures and forms which imitate nature. Plants have to be selected to suit the site, to match the soil and climate. Why waste time on a plant that doesn't really flourish in your garden? The ultimate benefit is saving effort. If the right balance of plants is used, they require little maintenance. The danger is that your more horticulturally-correct neighbours will claim you are growing a plot of weeds.

A wilder garden is never dull. It changes continuously to reflect the seasons. Nature abhors a vacuum and rarely leaves bare soil. Biennials such as foxgloves are ideal speedy colonisers of bare soil or new gardens before the rest of the planting has time to take over.

A high proportion of the plants used in this garden are wild species indigenous to Scotland. *Luzula sylvatica*, Greater Woodrush, features largely; this is a scrumptious evergreen perennial which provides an effective ground cover year round. Other woodland grasses such as *Deschampsia flexuosa* and *caespitosa* lend texture and interest to a shady corner. The aromatic perennial herb Sweet Cecily, *Myrrhis odorata* is a rampant self-seeder in a suitable site. As a herb, it is good in salads and for flavouring rhubarb. As its name suggests, it is a natural sweetener. Scottish gardens are rightly famous for the range of herbaceous perennials that flourish, disappearing for the Scottish winter and making the most of the brief summer.

## hard surfaces

The use of natural paving materials is expensive, but they give a garden an air of quality and permanence which justifies the cost and effort of searching for recycled materials.

**Tweed cobble paving** - Natural river stones about the size of a mango are set on end in sand. These were the standard hard surface before block paving and concrete slabs became cheap.

**Riven sandstone flags** - These massive slabs were split by hand along the grain of the stone and carry the marks of the hand tools that were used to finish the edges. This red sandstone came from now-derelict quarries near Blyth Bridge which once supplied farms and households throughout the Tweed valley with paving slabs.

**Whinstone cobbles** - Cut whinstone blocks salvaged from an industrial site in Leith.

**Granite gravel** - Granite gravel (6mm to dust) is a material which was favoured in the last century for paths in the formal gardens of Highland mansions. It is the Scottish equivalent of the 'hoggin' paths of southern England. The material binds when compacted, to make a robust free-draining surface..

## green oak sculptures

Sculptural seating is by Susheila Jamieson (tel: 01899 830443), a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art. Green oak is soft and easy to carve. As it dries out, it becomes hard and brittle (and will also crack and move). It will quickly turn silver outdoors and will resist rot almost indefinitely without any treatment. The oak is sourced from Scottish trees by McConnel Wood Products of Penpont (tel: 01848 3331662).