

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

WIN
A GARDEN
SHOW TRIP
TO ITALY
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GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED



Small
garden
special

CHOOSING AND
GROWING ELEGANT

fuchsia

PLUS

Olympic hero

Designer Nigel Dunnett's
wild and immersive garden

Modern outlook

A traditional walled garden
with contemporary planting

9
of the
best
fire pits

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KEY ELEMENTS

What City garden.
Where Hampstead, London.
Soil London clay with added compost.
Size 29m x 10m.
Aspect South facing.
Special features Biodiverse planting, wildflower lawn, Corten steel details.
Designed by Miria Harris (miriaharris.com).



Nature's way

A sensitive, low-intervention approach is the hallmark of this wildlife-friendly scheme designed by Miria Harris near to London's Hampstead Heath

WORDS KATE JACOBS PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

Garden designers can be inclined towards an out-with-the-old, in-with-the-new approach to existing plants to gain that tantalising blank canvas. But that's not London-based garden designer Miria Harris's way. Hers is a sensitive, low-intervention approach that urges sustainability and biodiversity. Other recurring themes in her work include a desire to play down hard boundaries and to weave edible elements through her planting schemes – tempting humans and wildlife alike.

The clients on this project, a family living in an extended Georgian cottage, a stone's throw from the urban wilderness of London's Hampstead Heath, had a tentative brief



that suited Miria's considered approach. Architects McLaren Excell had just completed an extensive renovation of the house with a thoughtful layering of old and new elements. The garden had inevitably been mangled in the process, but the family wanted to evoke the wild, overgrown atmosphere it had originally possessed. "The idea was to make the most of what was already there and to build on that, but also to leave a shadow of the former garden, a nod to the past," says Miria.

She drew inspiration from the work of pioneer wild gardener William Robinson, setting out to design a garden that did more than pay lip-service to the heath nearby, to create a wildlife-filled space through an abundance of berries and nectar-rich plants. Today the garden gradually progresses from a more ordered, rectilinear style by the house to a looser, more naturalistic area beyond. The long, rectangular plot is bordered by three neighbouring gardens and slopes gently downwards towards a multi-stemmed hazel and towering *Philadelphus* that has been carefully pruned to encourage flowering within nose-range.

The lawn was a prerequisite for the family's football-mad son. Miria opted for a species-rich lawn mix, which when mowed looks and serves as a conventional lawn, but when allowed to grow tall, as it is around its margins, is studded with salad burnet, clover and lady's bedstraw. The middle of the garden is anchored by a free-form isthmus of a bed, featuring three, old, bird cherry trees, one of them dead. "Our native bird cherries, with their limited season of visual interest, are not hugely exciting but they do bring height, structure – and birds – to the garden," says Miria. They make the perfect frame for a clambering 'Kiftsgate' rose and *Vitis coignetiae*, with colourful leaves and beautiful rosehips in the autumn. ▷

Clockwise, from top left

The burnt orange of *Euphorbia x martini* 'Baby Charm' stands out against the blue black of *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva'.

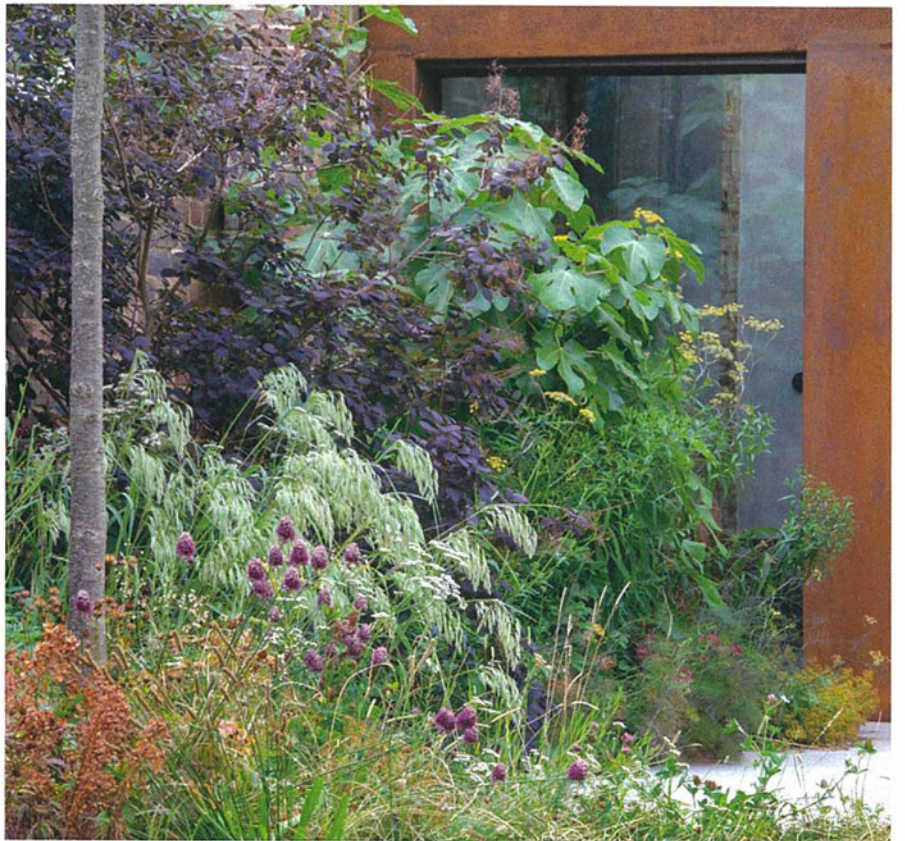
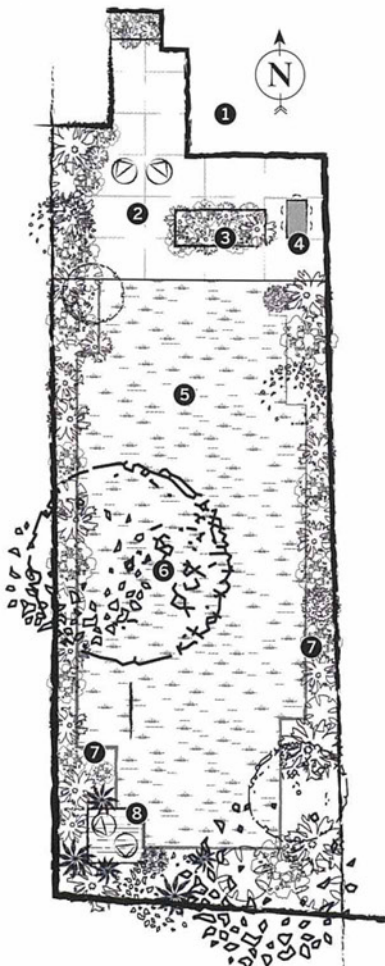
A rectangular bed in front of the kitchen-dining room makes a strong statement, allowing tantalising glimpses of the garden through the tall *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Giant Bronze', which provides year-round interest: fluffy mounds in spring, followed by statuesque fronds with yellow umbels in summer, and finally a skeletal framework for frost in winter.

The large, coppery leaves of *Heuchera* 'Walnut' blend subtly with the rust tones of the house's Corten steel.



GARDEN PLAN

- 1 House 2 Poured concrete terrace 3 Island bed
4 Dining area 5 Species-rich lawn 6 Existing
Prunus avium trees 7 Mixed planting beds
8 Ipe timber deck



▷ Miria also prizes the dead tree's rusty colour, which echoes the Corten steel of the house, the trellis frames and border edging.

She was keen to bring differing levels to this flat garden and introduced varying height in the borders with *Sambucus*, *Cotinus*, ornamental grasses such as *Calamagrostis emodensis* and large-leaved heucheras, in a palette of rich burgundy, rusty orange, copper and dirty pink. In an impressively bold stroke, Miria planted the rectangular island border in the middle of the poured concrete terrace with bronze fennel that towers head-high from midsummer. "It acts as a veil that filters the view and creates intrigue, to tempt people to come and explore the garden for themselves," she says.

In this garden, there's an ongoing attitude of working with nature rather than trying to constrain it. If the lawn isn't bowling green-perfect over a dry summer, it isn't watered. And there's no sense that the garden is ever finished. "Each year there is a new conversation between the different plants," smiles Miria. "I don't think I'll ever be done with this garden." □

THE IDEA WAS TO EVOKE
THE WILD, OVERGROWN
ATMOSPHERE THE GARDEN
HAD ORIGINALLY POSSESSED

This page

A pair of black Acapulco chairs is positioned to enjoy the view of the garden, which is framed by Corten steel columns and soft planting, including *Salvia* 'Wendy's Wish' and *Parthenocissus henryana*.

Facing page, clockwise from top left

Sculptural Corten steel frames are laid against the old garden wall and serve as a trellis for climbing plants, continuing the idea of merging old and new in this garden.

The poured concrete floor used inside the house continues on to the terrace where a vintage Tolix table and chairs are in the perfect spot for sunny lunches.

Allium sphaerocephalon, *Calamagrostis emodensis* and *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple' create colourful contrasts in the border by the music room.

