

HOMES & GARDENS

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AND LAYERING

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THE BEST
IN DESIGN
2024

November 2024

Garden views

London-based landscape designer Miria Harris on why we should embrace messiness and the delights of this time of year

“I was terrible at hide-and-seek as a child because my family always knew where to find me – in the greenhouse with the tomatoes. Growing up in Berkshire and Nottinghamshire, both nature and art were part of my childhood – I have memories of my mother making elderberry wine and painting outdoors with my father.

I used to work in the art world on public commissions, and even with Damien Hirst for a while, but at some point I realised I wanted to be a creator, not a curator. When I first got my own tiny courtyard garden, it changed everything – I became obsessed with plants, filling it with scented roses and growing whatever vegetables I could.

My gardening style is quite romantic, layering scent, texture and colour to create sensory-rich and biodiverse spaces. It is about evoking memories; I like to think of my landscapes as having a filmic quality. I have no desire to fix things in time and space and love the messy unpredictability of nature.

Don't be too keen to tidy up your garden all the time – the wildlife will thank you for it and your garden will feel more alive. A typical knee-jerk reaction when a tree dies is to chop it down and grind out the roots. However, a dead tree will improve the soil biome for a long time. It is about tricking the eye to make it appear alive – using the tree as a support for climbing plants such as clematis, roses or ornamental vines. Broken branches that come off can be piled up and left to decompose slowly, providing a valuable habitat for wildlife.

If I'm feeling uninspired I'll lose myself in a book or visit a favourite place, such as Gertrude Jekyll's garden Munstead Wood in Surrey, where she commissioned Edwin Lutyens to build her home after she planned the landscape. Often architecture comes first, so designing the garden beforehand feels brave and experimental, even by today's standards. I think a building should always feel at home in a landscape, not at odds with it. In the best projects I've worked on, there has been collaboration with the architects and interior designers too.

For many people this time of year can be difficult as the days get shorter and darker, but it is my favourite – I love the sun hanging slightly lower in the sky, the colours of leaves and the late-season maturity of herbaceous planting. And there are still lots of roses and scented plants that seem to be more fragrant than in summer. I particularly love the autumn blooms of *Rosa 'Boscobel'*. I often combine it with bronze fennel for its soft, fluffy foliage in spring, but mainly for those delicious clusters of seeds that make a wonderful autumn brew.”



Miria made her debut at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show this year with a garden for the Stroke Association



The show garden – a wildlife haven designed as a peaceful place to aid recovery – is now at a hospital in Leeds

FEATURE: HOLLY RANSOME PHOTOGRAPHS (PORTRAIT) HANNAH SMILES (STROKE ASSOCIATION GARDEN FOR RECOVERY, SPONSORED BY PROJECT GIVING BACK) BRITT WILLOUGHBY DYER