

The Garden



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SPECIAL ISSUE

Ideas for your garden

- ❖ Enjoy six inspirational, plant-filled gardens
- ❖ Practical advice to help you get the best from your plot
- ❖ Useful, edible and ornamental plants to start growing now

Garden ideas

East London garden

While most gardeners aspire to a plot that is measured in acres rather than square feet, small urban gardens are the reality faced by many – and they often need to address just as many challenges as their large-scale counterparts. Owners Katie and Nick needed their East London garden to tick a lot of boxes. Having recently extended their Victorian terrace in Hackney and added a garden studio to accommodate visiting family and friends, the pair wanted to make the most of the small outdoor space (about 14 x 7m/45 x 22ft) between the two buildings. They wanted it to balance their own needs, as well as those of their two young children and two cats, and to support local wildlife.

The couple's architects, Surman Weston, had previously worked with London-based landscape designer Miria Harris and suggested bringing her in. 'By that time, the plot resembled something between a builder's yard and a wasteland,' says Miria. Before training at Capel Manor and working under landscape designer Jinny Blom, Miria worked as a curator specialising in public art, 'but garden design eventually proved too strong a call to ignore'.

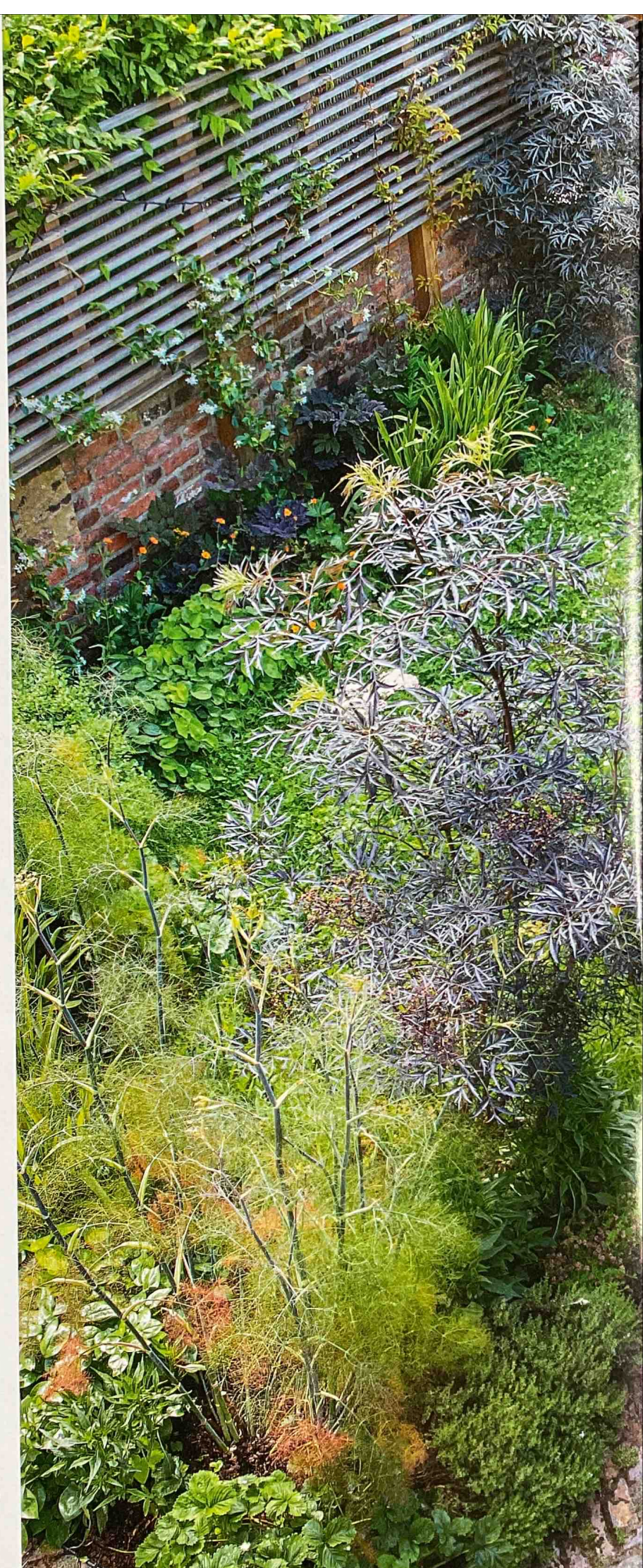
Design challenges

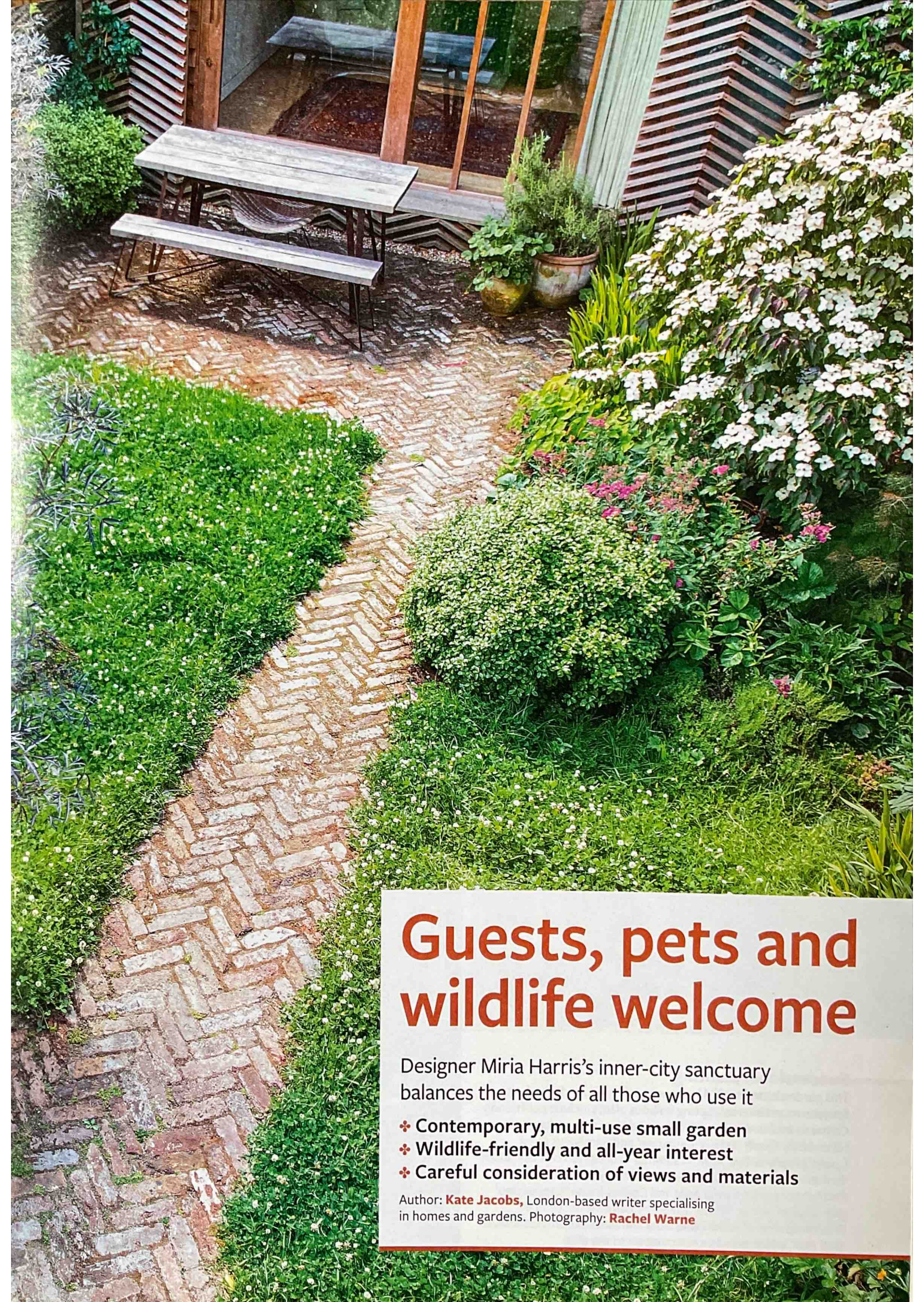
As well as keeping the garden's various users happy, the main brief from the owners was to find a way to link the house to the new garden studio, logistically and aesthetically, with a garden that would offer up interesting views from either vantage point, throughout the seasons.

'I wanted to avoid the urban-back-garden cliché of a rectangular plot where both the path, and the eye, run straight up the middle of the garden,' says Miria. As a solution, she created paved areas in front of both house and studio and positioned the path off-centre, taking the visitor on more of a journey.

To visually unite house and annexe, Miria drew on the materials of both. The London stock bricks of the path echo those of the house, while the path's herringbone pattern nods to the cedar chevrons that clad the annexe, and to the horizontal cedar battens that cover the walls on either side of the garden. 'These different elements create a sense of flow that binds the space together; it's as if they are having a conversation with one another,' she says.

Miria created mounds of planting at opposing ends on each side of the path, so that both small >>





Guests, pets and wildlife welcome

Designer Miria Harris's inner-city sanctuary balances the needs of all those who use it

- ❖ Contemporary, multi-use small garden
- ❖ Wildlife-friendly and all-year interest
- ❖ Careful consideration of views and materials

Author: **Kate Jacobs**, London-based writer specialising in homes and gardens. Photography: **Rachel Warne**



The creator

Miria Harris (above) fulfilled her brief in designing a haven for owners, wildlife, pets and children.

patios are flanked by areas of interest. This means that each building looks out onto greenery, rather than overlooking each other. 'It was my goal that every window or door should have its own unique views, like paintings.'

Tall yet airy plants such as *Foeniculum vulgare* 'Giant Bronze' offer tantalising glimpses of the garden. The family were keen to incorporate a lawn, but were delighted with Miria's more wildlife-friendly suggestion of lower-maintenance, species-rich meadow turf. 'It works well with the slightly wild and overgrown aesthetic of this garden,' she says.

Balancing the requirements of the garden's different users might seem a tall order in such a small plot, but Miria looked for common ground between the different groups. 'I always like to add edibles to my gardens, such as blackberries and wild strawberries, because children love to forage for them – as do birds, which also appreciate the berries on the cornus and sambucus.' To encourage more wildlife, there are pollinator-friendly plants such as *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' and *Rudbeckia*

fulgida var. *deamii* AGM, and both turf and trellis provide more beneficial, complex habitats for wildlife than a more conventional grass lawn or solid fence. The rudbeckia and fennel also provide structure long into winter even after dying back.

For the couple's pair of young cats, Miria only needed to exclude any toxic plants on which they might be tempted to nibble. Kate and Nick also asked for a garden where the children could romp around, rather than a playground, so Miria's design, with its paved recesses and playfully arranged plants, has created a 'hide-and-seek' atmosphere that children respond to. Similarly, grown-ups have been encouraged into the garden by placing a dining table on the paved area farthest from the house.

In this small urban garden, Miria has ticked the boxes so skilfully and subtly that her delighted clients notice only the beneficial effects of spending time in this glorious little haven. ○



Successional planting

This garden is overlooked by house and studio, and was designed for year-round interest. Spring bulbous plants include pet-friendly *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *leichtlinii* and *Nectaroscordum siculum*, followed by *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' and *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva' AGM. In summer *Crocus* *x* *crocosiiflora* 'Solfatare' and *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty' AGM star; then *Parthenocissus henryana* AGM and *Cornus kousa* 'Cappuccino' give autumn colour. Winter greenery comes from climber *Trachelospermum jasminoides* AGM and *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Golf Ball', which acts as a punctuation to the plot.

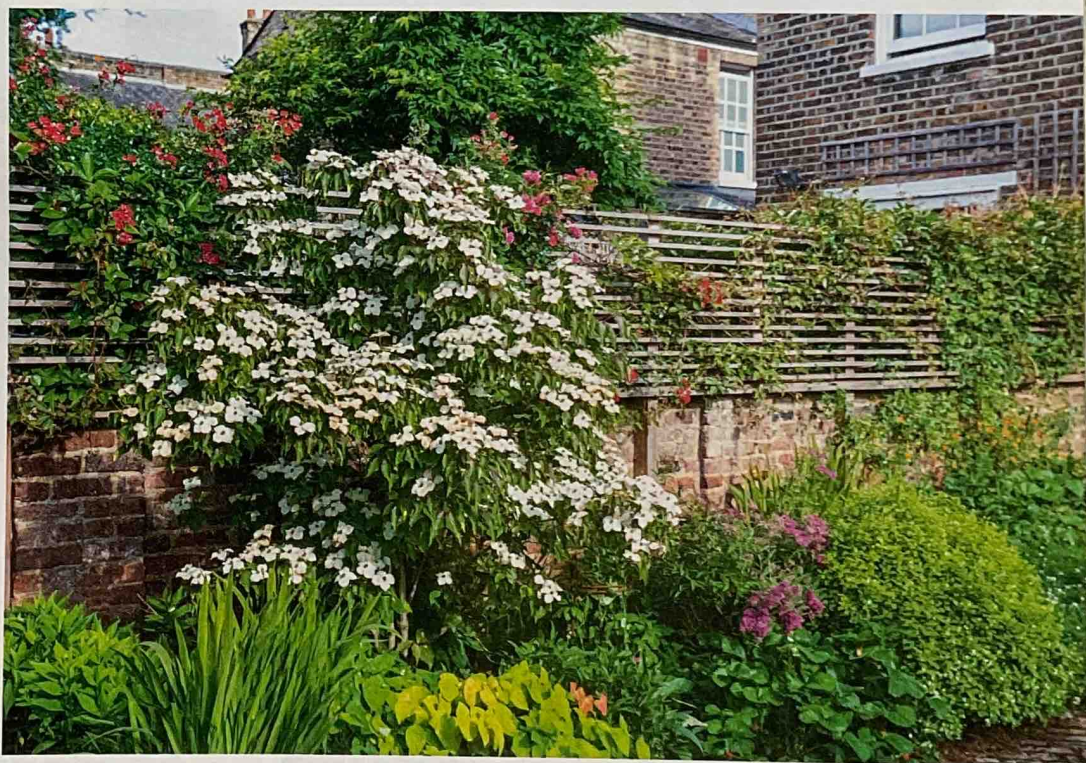
Turf decision

Even the smallest garden can achieve a meadow-like feel. With species-rich lawn turf, it encourages greater biodiversity and creates a wilder, looser effect than a standard lawn. The turf used here (supplied by wildflowerturf.co.uk) has 26 species of UK-native wildflowers and grasses, including *Trifolium repens*, *Rumex acetosa*, *Origanum vulgare* and *Achillea millefolium*. It can be laid onto existing topsoil or subsoil and, if watered for a fortnight to establish, should be drought tolerant. It can be mown every two to six weeks, but Miria suggests every three to four weeks allows it grow into pleasing, pillow-like forms.



Battens for biodiversity

By attaching cedar batten trellis to the garden walls, Miria has created a uniform look for this garden without impacting on the neighbours' boundary choices (below), and echoed the studio structure, giving continuity. By using trellis rather than solid panels, she has provided space for fragrant climbers such as *Trachelospermum jasminoides* AGM and *Rosa The Generous Gardener* ('Ausdrawn') AGM to entwine and gradually cover the trellis. It is also easy to tie in plants. Best of all, the space behind the battens provides somewhere for insects to make their homes, giving a further boost to wildlife. The shrub in magnificent full flower is *Cornus kousa* 'Cappuccino'.



Hardworking herringbone

To create a visual link between the Victorian house and the new, architect-designed studio, Miria opted for paths and patio areas that use London stock bricks, arranged in a herringbone formation; the same material as the house itself, with a pattern that nods to the chevrons of the batten-clad studio. Sand was swept into the joints of the path pavers to encourage moss and allow surface water to drain away quickly. The herringbone path brings a rustic-meets-contemporary note to the garden that is echoed in the bespoke table and benches – created with furniture designer David Blair Ross – that combine rough-hewn oak with bent steel legs.

Resources

Most plants mentioned here are listed in *RHS Plant Finder 2020*, and online at rhs.org.uk/findaplant

This private garden is not open to the public.