

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

# GARDENS

ILLUSTRATED

JUNE 2016 £4.50

*The making of a new*  
**English flower  
garden**

**20**  
OF THE BEST  
WISTERIA

PERFECT PLANT  
COMBINATIONS FOR  
*summer gardens*

Bring back  
the buttonhole

Let's wear flowers every day





**In brief**

**Name** De Tuinierie.  
**What** Romantic English-style garden with garden rooms and herbaceous borders.  
**Where** Near Groningen, the Netherlands.  
**Size** 1,400 square metres.  
**Soil** Light, sandy soil, enriched with manure and compost over the years.  
**Climate** Temperate maritime.  
**Hardiness rating** USDA 8.

# A riot of colour

Designer Alie Stoffers has a passion both for plants and for finding the perfect hues to create exuberant borders – as her own garden demonstrates

WORDS INA SPERL PHOTOGRAPHS SIETSKJE DE VRIES

Sometimes, on her garden open days, Alie Stoffers overhears visitors saying they must have “come at just the right time”. Truth is, it is nearly always the right time to visit Alie’s garden. Certainly from April to August, but Alie also ensures year-round interest by planting masses of bulbs for spring and choosing plants with good structure for winter. “Everyone has a nice garden in June,” says Alie. Well, maybe. But ‘nice’ is an understatement for this exceptional garden.

Her generously planted borders have exquisite colour schemes, from blues and pale yellows in front of the house, to pastels and reds. Alie is a genius when it comes to matching colours. “I have a colour memory,” she says. She spends time browsing plant catalogues, searching for perfect pairings. One of her combinations is *Silene dioica* ‘Firefly’ with the dahlias ‘Black Wizard’ and ‘Karma Naomi’.

Her 1,400 square-metre plot is a paradise for plant lovers and enthusiasts of English gardens alike. There is a herb garden near the kitchen, leading on to vibrant purple and hot borders, a woodland walk and a white garden with foxgloves growing in light shade. A romantic summer house stands on a small lawn, and at the far end of the garden is a small, colourful vegetable and fruit plot. Everything is held together by immaculate brickwork paths and neatly trimmed hedges of yew, ligustrum, hornbeam and *Pyrus salicifolia* ‘Pendula’. “No swaying grasses here,” says Alie, laughing. “I like classical elements. I can’t help it.”

When she and her husband Jan moved here 25 years ago there was nothing but farmland behind the house. Alie had a clear idea of what she wanted: an axis from her kitchen window stretching towards the open fields, with several garden rooms along it. Her design was inspired by Arley Hall in Cheshire and by Powis Castle and Bodnant Garden in north Wales. What is remarkable is that Alie created her garden before she

**Left** Alie created this garden on very poor soil over 21 years. It has striking borders, such as the hot and purple borders. A hornbeam hedge separates this colourful garden room from her herb garden.



Alie felt she was missing something in her life. "Then I saw Geoff Hamilton presenting *Gardeners' World*. It hit me. I knew instantly: I have to garden"

▷ ever visited Britain. "It probably had to do with what I saw on *Gardeners' World*," she says, recalling that watching the programme was a turning point in her life. Alie worked in a photo lab, but felt she was missing something in her life. "Then I saw Geoff Hamilton presenting *Gardeners' World*. It hit me. I knew instantly: I have to garden."

Alie started off happily with plants given by friends, family and neighbours, including a *Cornus* var. *kousa* 'China Girl' and a snowdrop tree (*Halesia carolina*), which surprised them with its white flowers in spring. These trees are still very much favourites. But Alie, who was pleased with "everything that flowered" in the beginning, has become more discerning. "You have to find three good reasons for a new plant. As well as its colour, it has to have a nice shape and grow well in your soil."

Gardening is now Alie's life. She has her own garden design studio, De Tuinerie, and admits to working 100 hours a week. Her parents and husband help to keep her own garden in shape. Not having children was her deliberate choice. "The garden is my life, my everything," she says. Every three or four years, Alie digs up her borders. She adds manure, some new plants and plenty of

spring bulbs. In the hot border she has just introduced a new *Solidago x luteus* 'Greenfinch'. In the purple border, there's a beautiful *Campanula lactiflora* 'Loddon Anna'. "Why not plant *Phlox x arendsii* 'Utopia' when you want soft pink in late summer?" she says.

Alie loves her plants but she's not sentimental. When her box hedges were struck by box blight, she says, "It hurt me every time I saw them, so it was time to say farewell." And she's not one to be easily deterred. "I did everything to have *Abstroemeria aurea* 'Orange King' in my garden," she says. It's a bulb that is difficult to establish, but over 15 years her three plants multiplied to 3,000 – "far too many".

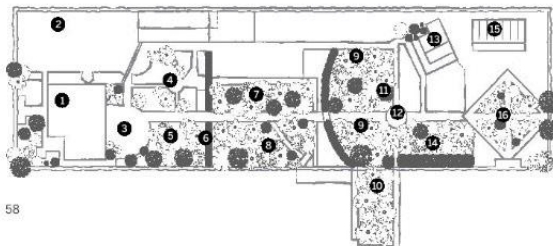
Alie is planning to extend the garden to the south, with more garden rooms, a building for teaching in, and a perennial meadow. Unsurprisingly, she's already designed it. □

**USEFUL INFORMATION**

**Address** De Tuinerie, Vrouwenlaan voor 12, 9615 TB Kolham, Groningen, the Netherlands.  
**Website** de-tuinerie.nl  
**Open** On selected days or by appointment.

**GARDEN PLAN**

- |               |                  |                     |                   |
|---------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1 House       | 5 Crimson border | 9 Woodland garden   | 13 Summer house   |
| 2 Driveway    | 6 Hornbeam hedge | 10 Perennial meadow | 14 Pastel border  |
| 3 Terrace     | 7 Hot border     | 11 White garden     | 15 Greenhouse     |
| 4 Herb garden | 8 Purple border  | 12 Pond             | 16 Kitchen garden |



1 Alie chose the same brick paving throughout the garden to prevent the paths drawing the eye away from the plants.  
 2 A beautiful climber, *Rosa* 'Paul's Himalayan Musk', grows over an arch by the herb garden.  
 3 A large, well-trimmed virginia creeper is allowed to climb over the roof of Alie's house.  
 4 A lemon-coloured petunia looks at home in an old galvanised bucket, while *Rosa* 'New Dawn' grows above the archway.  
 5 To the right of the path, the hazy-blue catmint *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' sets off the majenta *Geranium psilostemon* and pink *Geranium x oxonianum* 'Robbylund'.  
 6 White foxglove spires echo the verticals of two young Himalayan birch trunks. *Viola* 'Belmont Blue' flowers in front of the clipped box.  
 7 Alie has trained two Dutch pears over an arch in the kitchen garden. The long-flowering, hardy *Geranium Rozanne* (= 'Gerwat') partially obscures the picket fence.  
 8 The summer house verandah is the perfect place from which to enjoy the white garden, especially at twilight.



## 5 Inspiring plant combinations

**1 Lilac and magenta.** In the purple border, *Salvia nemorosa* 'Amethyst' and *Geranium psilostemon* form a gorgeous, long-flowering combination. The salvia grows 1m tall and has spikes of soft-lilac flowers on dark purple stems, which look wonderful with the geranium's strong magenta flowers. This part of the garden room is a joy in summer, with *Rosa Rhapsody in Blue* (= 'Fantasia') and *Thalictrum* 'Splendide'.

**2 Mauve and purple.** In the front of the purple border, the pale-lilac flowers of *Nepeta sibirica* shine against the dark leaves of *Sambucus nigra* f. *porphyrophylla* 'Eva'. This elder, with its delicate, light-pink flowers in summer, is a key plant here in all seasons and Alie selects colours to complement it: pink tulips in spring, then astrantia, lunaria and the feathery spires of *Pennisetum orientale* 'Karley Rose' through the summer.

**3 Crimson and red.** Alie has created some unusual combinations here in the crimson border, choosing plants that do well in partial shade. She's added some soft pink colours to freshen it up. *Lupinus* 'The Page' flowers among *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Rubenza', the annual *Trifolium rubens* and *Dahlia* 'Karma Naomi'. One of her favourites is the annual *Lychnis coronaria* 'Gardeners' World' (= 'Blych') because of its long flowering period and pretty grey foliage.

**4 Indigo and pink.** *Geranium* 'Orion' mingles with *Chamaenerion angustifolium* 'Stahl Rose', *Nepeta sibirica* and the red-tipped leaves of *Phlox paniculata* 'Blue Paradise'. The rosebay willowherb is spreading, but Alie likes it because of its light, soft pink flowers that appear to walk through the border. It can easily be pulled out where it is not wanted. It matches the rambler *Rosa* 'Mary Rose' (= 'Ausmary').

**5 White and green.** Alie's white border is in dappled shade, thanks to the tall snowdrop tree. "A tree in the border is not ideal, but with the right plants, it is possible," she says. *Rosa Iceberg* (= 'Korbin'), white campion and the beautiful but short-lived annual *Orlaya grandiflora* all flower in abundance.

