

WHAT, WHERE, HOW AND WHY



In the garden with Wendy Matheson

Seduced by images in magazines, books and countless gardening programmes on the telly we endlessly search for unusual, exotic and occasionally downright bizarre plants in our gardens. Inspired by those adventurous Victorian plant burgeoning borders and beds.

Perhaps though we should pause for thought when in an era of uncertain climate change and decreasing pocket sizes. We should go back to basics and consider the climate we have. Scotland has so many varied microclimates that it is virtually impossible to dictate the same planting combination in any two gardens even in the same street. As all gardeners will know the position of the plant given all the elements influencing its survival is the secret of successful gardening.

Our Scottish maritime climate provides ample rainfall and we rarely see droughts or devastatingly hot weather therefore large amounts of plant varieties can be grown from all over the world. Sea, topography, latitude and prevailing winds all provide a huge climate variation for such a small country. With mountainous areas giving us colder, cloudier, wetter and windier and inland much colder but drier. With western highland average annual rainfall greater than 300cm compared with an east coast average rainfall of 80cm.



If you have had your garden for a number of years you will be familiar with the way it is affected in different weather patterns – if you are new to your garden or considering new beds and borders it would be advisable to get to know how the sun moves around the plot, what type of soil you have, how the wind effects the garden and where the frost pockets are.

A good indications of what grows well is to look at neighbouring gardens and see what is most successful and where is it growing in that particular garden.

Temperature, drainage and exposure to wind affect plant choice the most and will dictate what can be left in the garden all year round.

Local areas such as Braemar, Spey Valley and the Northern Islands need the toughest of plants to survive but can still be damaged by exceptional weather.

But in contrast the west coast areas affected by the Gulf Stream can tolerate plants from the sub tropical zones.

When choosing a plant, the H or hardiness rating is the most reliable category to identify which plant to use in Scotland.

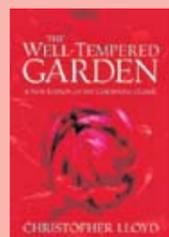
H5 being the most hardy down to H3 in the mildest parts of the west coast once hardened off. H1 is only suitable for greenhouse cultivation and H2 plants may grow with protection in mild areas.

Poor drainage could result in massive plant and lawn failure and should be addressed at the onset of your garden makeover. A good practice to find out about the drainage of your garden is to dig a few holes two spades depth in the areas of the garden you are planning to change and pour a watering can of water into the hole, if the water takes more than a minute to drain then you have a drainage issue and will need to address this before planting. New build properties suffer from this in particular as builders tend to leave a lot of debris around the plot and cover with just the bare minimum of top soil, also heavy machinery causes compaction of the soil which has a panning effect.

This month's must-have book

The Well-Tempered Garden by the late, great Christopher Lloyd

Published by Phoenix, ISBN: 978-1841882222



If areas of your garden are needing to be drained effectively you need to look at several issues including where to take the run-off water and where to store it or create a soakaway. There is legislation in the UK called SUDS, which could affect your plan, advice should be taken from your local authority, landscaper or designer.

In the Highlands we have very little clay and our soil is either sand, loam or peat based, soil improvement is therefore usually a case of incorporating sand and gravel into peat and rotted organic matter into sand and loam to condition the soil before planting.

I always recommend using a seaweed based fertiliser and plenty of mulch – bark being the most common and easily obtained

One of the best ways to ensure the success of your plants is to purchase them from a local nursery that either propagates its own plants or brings them in from a wholesale nursery grower in Scotland. Beware of plants which have been brought in from Italy and Holland if you live in a particularly exposed or frost pocket area as apart from the miles they have travelled they will not generally have the hardiness of Scottish grown plants.

Scotland is currently fortunate in that we still have a number of local nurseries growing specifically for the Scottish market.

Some of our local nurseries specialising in Scottish provenance species:

- Garden Cottage Nurseries, Poolewe www.gcnurseries.co.uk
- Poyntzfield Herb Nursery, Dingwall www.poyntzfieldherbs.co.uk
- Speyside Heather Centre, Dulnain Bridge www.heathercentre.com
- Abriachan Nursery, Loch Ness www.lochnessgarden.com
- Ardfearn Nursery, Bunchrew www.ardfearn-nursery.co.uk
- Highland Liliums, Kiltartly www.highlandliliums.co.uk

There are plenty of other small, independent nurseries and garden centres which need our continued support otherwise they will go the way of many of our high street traders and fall in the wake of the mighty supermarket with its massive buying and dominating marketing power. Leaving us with the pitiful plant choice and suitability that the large supermarkets provide – be warned!

Another consideration is potential damage by pests and animals, which will be covered in my next article outlining plants that are resistant to rabbits, deer and parasitic insects.

- If you wish to find out more about plants suitable for your garden or you know your garden could look better than it does but you are struggling to achieve its potential and would like to discuss any garden project with Wendy, contact her on: 07703 737 530, email info@wmgardendesign.com or go to www.wmgardendesign.com

NEXT TIME...

How to plant for pest resistance.

A competition to win a free garden consultancy.

Books to put on your Christmas wish list

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size:3.193 by257.96

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