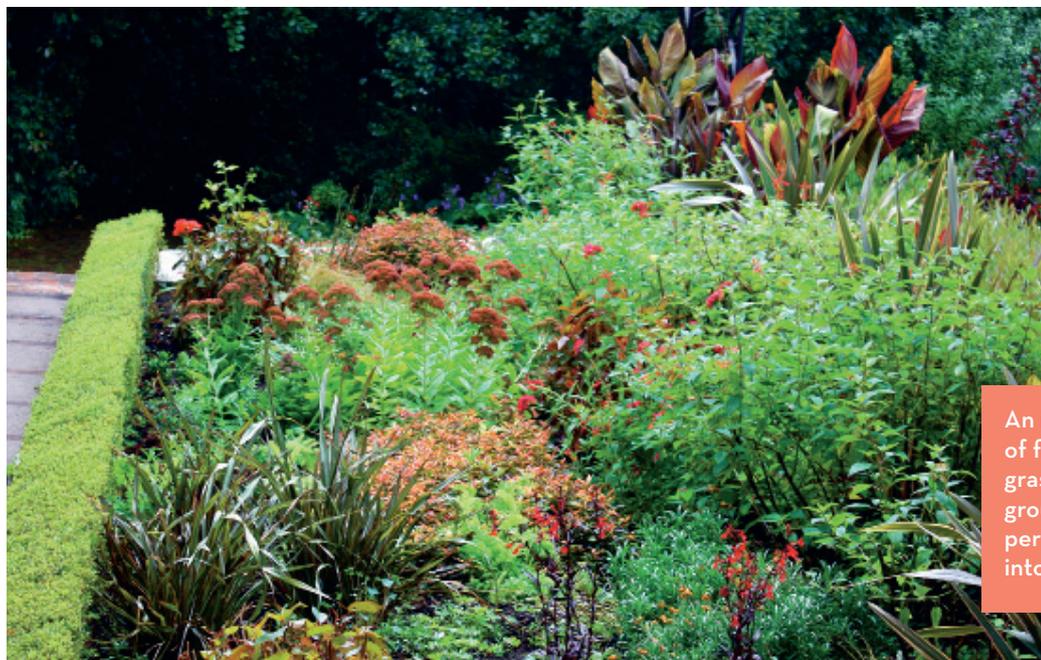


Prolonging the Pleasure

Landscape designer Franchesca Watson suggests ways to keep your garden flourishing through the heat of summer



An innovative combination of flowering perennials, grasses and delicate groundcovers provides perpetual flowering well into the summer months

After the Christmas holidays and when summer heat seriously sets in, my garden tends to become a little ragged. I think it's a common problem. Apart from the essential gentle pruning and constant deadheading to prevent things looking too overblown, I am always looking for ways to help it along.

Obviously, keeping the garden watered is a priority, and there are excellent rain sensors that can be fitted as an adjunct to your irrigation system if you cannot rely on regular rainfall in the summer and don't want to be moving a hose around. Winter-rainfall areas probably can't do without an irrigation system of some kind. Mulching is wonderful for keeping the soil moist and relatively weed-free, and has the added bonus of making the garden look a little more cared for as opposed to when bare soil is showing. There are a number of materials that make good mulch — bark chips, compost, shredded leaves and twigs, gravels and peach pips. I prefer a dark-coloured compost, which

looks luxuriant while also adding nutrients to the soil every time one waters, and I stock up with my favourite kind in bags, so that it can be easily stored and moved around and added to any areas that are looking hot and unhappy.

I have an area in my garden where I have quite a few perennials and the trick here is to organise a progression. Spring

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and early summer are easy, as there is so much in flower — such as irises and angelica, which give way to *Penstemon* and *Trachelium caeruleum* in the high summer. My purple echinacea drifts are wonderful in peak summer but after that I have a gap

in flowering until the Japanese anemones put on their show in early autumn. You need to look for something quick and easy to solve this problem, and I have found that the dwarf white cosmos does the trick in my garden. I plant them out of six-packs before the Christmas holidays and they flower in February when very little else is in bloom.

In winter the problem is worse. After the clean-out in late July, everything is gappy so I plant out trays of the purple Oriental mustard lettuce. They fill the spaces and provide splashes of burgundy all through winter's miserable weather. When the early irises are finished, in about mid September, the lettuces start becoming lanky and need to be taken out to make way for the spring growth spurt of the permanent perennials.

Every garden is different and it may take a season or two of experimenting to find out what works best for you — but it's worth planning a little for a great late-summer garden — just when one is using the garden most. ■ Franchesca Watson

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