

‘Creating Movement whilst Frozen Still’

Ben Pope

13th December 2023

With 25 years of horticultural experience, Ben has spent the past 15 years as head gardener of a private estate near Midhurst, maintaining the large garden to a very high standard, whilst growing fruit, vegetables and cut flowers, as featured on Gardeners' World.

In addition, Ben teaches at West Dean College and the Chelsea Physic Garden.

Ben suggested that, rather than ‘putting the garden to bed’, we use structure and winter colour to create movement by visual effects.

Views, Shapes, Surfaces, Spaces:

Create a visual path around garden – the eye moves more slowly and calmly along curved edges, whereas it will follow straight lines more rapidly.

Using different types of surface will also slow the eye down as it moves from one to another.

He showed how this calming effect can also be achieved with rounded and undulating tops to box hedging. The junction of two main paths was softened with an invitation to linger by having the four corners of the hedging rounded, rather than ending in straight angles.

Clipped plants such as lavender can form domes under frost or snow. Beech, yew, bare branches and Garria, with hanging tassels, all provide contrasting shapes and colour.

Light and reflections:

Be aware of light and how it moves around garden.

Side lighting from low sun in winter and long shadows cast on the lawn can create attractive effects.

Using reflections from water or mirrors adds depth to the view.

Repetition and perspective:

Repetition of shapes and colours can provide interest and a sense of perspective.

Create the impression of greater distance by gradually reducing the width of a path.

Box balls of diminishing sizes, again using false perspective to give an impression of distance.

Plants:

Just some of the plants that Ben suggested for the winter garden, either to add structure and movement, or colour, especially the bulbs heralding the end of winter:

Monarda - stands well until February

Aster umbellatus

Phlomis – will last throughout winter

Potentilla

Calamagrostis ‘Karl Foerster’ – glows in sunlight

Garrya elliptica

Miscanthus nepalensis

Miscanthus sinensis – Golden colour in winter sun

Cyclamen:

- C. hederifolium: after ending flowering early in winter, its foliage will then continue to look good.
- C. coum: flowers later in winter.
- Do not grow these two types of cyclamen together, as C. hederifolium will completely take over.

Primulas

Crocus

Hellebores

Hyacinths – useful for colour and scent at the end of winter.

Species tulips, e.g. *Tulipa turkestanica*

Scilla bifolia e.g. Peter Nijssen

Muscari

Eryngium – leave flower heads standing through winter.

End of winter – *Pulmonaria*

Cardoon

Trees and shrubs

Hamamelis 'Aphrodite'

Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill'

Garrya elliptica 'James Roof'

Skimmia

Sarcococca for scent

Colourful stems:

Rubus (white stemmed bramble), *Salix* (willow), *Cornus* (dogwood) –

all require hand pruning right back, as only the new season's stems will have the best colour.

Cornus 'Midwinter Fire'

is not so robust, so only take down a proportion of the stems each year.

Deciduous grasses – cut back mid/end February to let new shoots come through.

Evergreen grasses – just comb them through to get rid of dead growth at the end of winter e.g. Pheasant's tail grass (*Stipa arundinacea*), *Stipa tenuissima* and *Carex*.