

IN BRIEF

What Small, southwest-facing town garden.
Where London.
Size 49.5 square metres.
Soil Improved London clay.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 9.

A pair of Japanese pagoda trees (*Styphnolobium japonicum*) are an airy presence at the front of the garden, with mounds of *Hakonechloa macra* at their feet. Stepping up from the smooth concrete area by the house, a fixed boulder is followed by fettled, York paving stepping stones.

Wild at heart

Prolific design duo Harris Bugg have created an exquisite slice of urban meadow in a wildlife-friendly garden in north London

WORDS KENDRA WILSON PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM



I love this garden,” says Charlotte Harris of design duo Harris Bugg, who, between Charlotte in London and Hugo Bugg in Exeter, take on a dizzying variety of projects, of every size and description. Not to mention their upcoming Main Avenue show garden for this year’s RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Tucked away behind a north London terrace, this is one of the pair’s smaller gardens, a microcosm of their focus on texture and shape, with imaginative hard landscaping.

“Looseness is a word that was used a lot during the planning,” Charlotte recalls as she describes the client’s brief. “He wanted something wild, like a meadow in the back garden.” It’s music to a designer’s ears, she notes, when clients with small gardens do not ask for a lawn. Instead, the garden has ‘moments’ during the day, in response to the sun’s progress; an antique table towards the back is uncluttered by chairs, and provides a focus, if not a destination, for the winding path of stepping stones that begin at the garden’s second level.

The combined canopies of a pair of Japanese pagoda trees (*Styphnolobium japonicum*) create a sense of privacy outside the garden room of the house, throwing a bit of shade over the front of this refined urban meadow. Fresh-green rugs of *Hakonechloa macra* cheerfully flop over edges, and are joined further in by plants that are generally more obliging than aggressive. Evergreen *Anemanthele lessoniana* (pheasant grass) can get too full, but is easily thinned by running one’s fingers through it, in the manner of a razor comb.

“I like the idea that things are moving around and are not too controlled in here,” says Charlotte of this year-old garden. The intention is to keep a sense of delicacy. White foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea* ‘Dalmatian White’) are expected to spread around, with meadow cranesbill (*Geranium* ‘Brookside’) rambling through. Common valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) has a reputation for rampant behaviour, but it can easily be thinned as it threads its way through this London plot.

“You want certain things to be thuggish, so that they can withhold a kicking next to paths,” says Charlotte. To this end, she and Hugo have used *Alchemilla erythropoda*, which is “really pretty” but tough like *Alchemilla mollis*. Dense, carpeting *Soleirolia soleirolii* ▷

Above from left to right

***Rosa x odorata* ‘Mutabilis’** A signature Harris Bugg plant, valued not only for its changing hues in the peach-pink spectrum but also the sense of delicate wildness that it brings.

Valeriana officinalis gives height to a meadow-like planting, growing to 1m at least, with small, terminal flowers of white or palest pink. Needs thinning to keep it in check.

Schizophragma hydrangeoides, the Japanese hydrangea vine, is less vigorous than climbing hydrangea, with more distinctive foliage and flowers. Seen here in semi-shade with *Hosta* ‘Devon Green’.

Stems of *Styphnolobium japonicum* are a striking green, with markings that bear some resemblance to those of cherry. The intention is to maintain a vase structure with the stems, so that they can be looked through. Side shoots that are lower down the stems are pruned out in winter.

The word 'looseness' was used a lot during planning. I like the idea that things move around and are not too controlled



▷ (mind-your-own-business) has also been used in shade: "It's such a hooligan but felt right here, with the stepping stones."

Leftover York stone slabs have been used at the back, fitted together by contractor Mark Whyman, in a way that is more crazy-paving than modular, thus aiding the flow of planting. At the front, a sourced boulder reaches towards limestone-paving smoothness. This sense of warm elegance extends to the woven oak trellis: "In this tiny slice of meadow, we wanted something that was softer than slatted trellising," says Charlotte. The result is a contemporary nod to woven hazel.

Reports from the owner suggest that this garden is constantly visited by local wildlife, with squirrels competing for wild strawberries. It is chemical-free, and the hostas show no sign of snail damage. "This is entirely because there is a lot of bird life in here," says Charlotte. "It's a very happy little garden." □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Charlotte and Hugo's work at harrisbugg.com

Garden foraging

Part of the client's brief for Harris Bugg Studio was that he wanted his urban meadow to have an edible element. Edgings of wild strawberries and prostrate rosemary provide texture and an effective groundcover as well as being harvestable. Herbs, in sunny areas and in pots, include thyme, fennel, lemon verbena, upright rosemary and loose shrubs of bay.

Other good-value plants include Sichuan pepper (*Zanthoxylum simulans*): "It has a really nice filigree quality, then you get the pepper at the end of the season," says Charlotte. A broad-leaved sausage vine (*Holboellia latifolia*) has enthusiastically covered the back wall, producing strange-looking but palatable fruit in autumn.

Above from left to right

Zanthoxylum simulans The Sichuan pepper is another Harris Bugg favourite, which they have also used in the new, walled kitchen garden at RHS Garden Bridgewater.

Digitalis purpurea 'Dalmation White' will soon be spreading down the middle of this meadow garden of sun and dappled shade.

Perennial grass *Hakonechloa macra* provides understory texture for this shady corner, along with *Hosta* 'Devon Green', wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*) and mind-your-own-business (*Soleirolia soleirolia*).