



10 things to see at the Chelsea Flower Show

The biggest event on the gardening calendar returns on May 22 after a tough season – here, our selection of the top gardens and designers

By Clare Coulson

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When is the Chelsea Flower Show?

It is open to the public from May 23 to 27 (Tuesday 23rd and Wednesday 24th are RHS members' days).

How do I get tickets?

Book via the [RHS website](#). Prices start from £37.85 for RHS members, or £48.85 for non-members.

Is there a dress code?

There is no official dress code; the advice from the RHS is to check the weather forecast and wear suitable clothing and footwear.

When the Chelsea Flower Show opens on May 22, it will be after one of the most challenging growing seasons for nurseries and designers, with a long, cold winter followed by a very wet, cool spring, not to mention several weeks of mud-bath conditions at the Royal Hospital Chelsea site.

But the growers, exhibitors and teams behind the scenes are a resilient bunch, and it's safe to say that the show gardens and the displays in the Great Pavilion will be as beguiling as ever when the show opens. Some themes from the past couple of years continue to dominate the Main Avenue gardens – a focus on naturalistic planting, rewilding and biodiversity-boosting schemes; and several show gardens nod to abandoned spaces, too, where nature has been left to its own devices, complete with dead trees.

And just as many employ reclaimed materials – including Darren Hawkes, who has repurposed 85 per cent of his materials from salvage, searching demolition sites, scrapyards and farmyards for his Samaritans' Listening Garden.



Rosa glauca, Euphorbia and Echium vulgare all feature | CREDIT: Getty

There's a continuing focus on the restorative power of nature, too. For the second year, the grant-making scheme Project Giving Back is supporting gardens across the show, including seven show gardens, two sanctuary gardens and all six gardens in the All About Plants category. These gardens are created with charities, educational programmes and community-interest groups and all are relocated after the show.

In the Great Pavilion, the 70 exhibitors include Claire Austin, who returns after an eight-year hiatus with two exhibits featuring perennials and irises. There are several new exhibitors, too, including the Caley Brothers, who are bringing mushrooms to the Great Pavilion for the first time; Lincolnshire Pond Plants – the first pond-plant exhibit to appear at Chelsea in many years; and the Fleur de Lys nursery – part of a new grower co-op, specialising in conservatory plants.



Surrounded by nectar-rich planting, The Newt's Beezantium highlights the plight of bees

The hugely popular Balcony and Container Gardens and Houseplant Studios also return for another year. Headline sponsor The Newt is bringing a reimagining of its Somerset immersive bee experience, the Beezantium, to Chelsea to highlight the plight of these insects, and its beehive structure will be surrounded by nectar-rich planting.

Around the Monument, designer Pollyanna Wilkinson is highlighting women in horticulture, with a beautiful Plankbridge shepherd's hut that will be surrounded by crowd-pleasing borders packed with cottage-garden plants circled with woven willow. All of the plants have been grown in women-led independent nurseries.

Also making its debut is the Children's Picnic at Chelsea – an initiative from the new RHS director general Clare Matterson that will see 100 schoolchildren from some of the most disadvantaged areas of London attend the show on May 22, with the aim of igniting a passion for plants in a new generation.

Horatio's Garden by Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg



This meticulously-designed garden is named in memory of Dr Olivia Chapple's son, who was raising funds to create the very first spinal-centre garden

“It was really important for it to be patient-led and meticulous, because it's a garden that's stopping off at Chelsea on the way to Sheffield,” says Charlotte Harris, who, along with Hugo Bugg, has created a design for Horatio's Garden that will find its final home at Sheffield's Princess Royal Spinal Cord Injuries Centre.

It will be the eighth garden for the charity, founded by Dr Olivia Chapple, whose son Horatio was raising funds to create the very first spinal-centre garden before he was killed in a polar-bear attack in 2011. His work has continued and each garden has radically transformed the lives of the patients who are adjusting to life-changing spinal injuries.

Speaking to the patients (as well as to their families, NHS staff and the head gardeners who then maintain each of the charity's gardens) was a key part of the design process. One of the main messages from patients, who are often stuck on wards for months at a time with little privacy, was the need for “a place to escape to that was beautiful and natural”.

“It’s very important that the garden is at different layers and levels, too, so that patients can experience the garden and see the plants and wildlife from lower down,” adds Bugg, who says that the biggest technical challenge was to create seamless paths that allow chairs and beds to move easily around the space. A new permeable, cement-free terrazzo paving, created using crushed waste, has been developed for the garden.



Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg | CREDIT: Clara Molden

Surprisingly, this is the first Main Avenue show garden at Chelsea that puts wheelchair accessibility at the forefront of the design. As always with this duo’s gardens, the planting will dazzle. Acer and birch trees provide dappled light over woodland planting that includes *Aruncus ‘Horatio’*, the intriguing *Polygonatum x hybridum ‘Betberg’* and *Boehmeria platanifolia* Lushan.

“I’m totally delighted that we’ve tracked it down; it’s one of my favourite woodland plants,” says Harris who found the *Boehmeria platanifolia* cultivar on a visit to de Hessenhof last year. The bronze tones of the foliage are also echoed in the sequoia shingles of a garden structure designed by McMullan Studio, who worked on the duo’s 2021 Gold Medal-winning M&G garden.

In contrast, there will be intense blues (including *Iris ‘Shirley Pope’*), oranges and zingy limes (from *Euphorbia palustris* and *E griffithii* Dixter). Stone cairns, inspired by the Peak District – in a nod to Sheffield’s surrounding landscape – and a table water feature will bring wildlife into the garden, while a new artwork featuring 1,000 thumbprints in clay of

the centre's patients, as well as those who worked on the garden, will be on display inside the wooden garden structure.

Nurture Landscapes Garden by Sarah Price



Resplendent with irises in a palette of pink, blue and yellow, this design is inspired by artist Cedric Morris | CREDIT: Artwork by Sarah Price Landscapes

Cedric Morris's irises last took centre stage at Chelsea when Sarah Cook showed her collection in the Great Pavilion in 2015. It was the first spark that inspired Sarah Price to create a garden using them:

“They have an elegance; they are not too far from the species, but it's the colours and the veining that draw you in. They are rich yet muddy – it's really hard to describe them.”

A few years later, she visited Morris's home, Benton End in Suffolk, where the artist and plantsman prolifically bred irises through the mid-20th century, introducing 90 named cultivars. “It was enchanting,” says Price, of bulbs growing through long grasses, with the shimmering *Elaeagnus* ‘Quicksilver’ arching overhead and deep green pines providing the backdrop.



British garden designer Sarah Price | CREDIT: Clara Molden

All these elements have come together in Price's Nurture Landscapes Garden, along with a colour palette inspired by Morris's evocative paintings. Straw cob walls will echo the richly coloured plastered walls of the 16th-century house, along with a palette of pink, blue and yellow inspired by two of Morris's paintings – *Cotyledon & Eggs*, and *The Eggs*. As well as irises, many of Morris's other cultivars will feature in the garden, too, including his grey poppies, *Lathyrus odoratus* 'Cedric Morris' and the rambling Rosa 'Sir Cedric Morris'.

Rosa chinensis 'Mutabilis' is another favourite plant for Price, and for Chelsea it has been grown as a climber. There's also a big emphasis here on recycling and reuse – the garden is

low-carbon and sustainable, with waste materials including old brick, glass, oyster shells and wood used throughout.

Bricks are air-dried and made from waste, as are many of the pots in the garden. Furniture has been made from fallen trees that would otherwise have been used as firewood, and the cordage that supports the climbers is made from brambles and waste hop vines. In a similar sense of circularity, much of the garden will be relocated to Benton End – now in trust to the Garden Museum and under development as a hub for the arts, education and horticulture – after the show.

A Letter from a Million Years Past by Jihae Hwang



The inspiration for this garden takes root in the Jirisan mountain in South Korea

Jihae Hwang's *A Letter from a Million Years Past* is inspired by the Jirisan mountain in the artist's South Korea homeland, where about 1,500 medicinal plants thrive in unique microclimates. These native herbs and alpine plants have been used in traditional medicine for centuries, and for Hwang – who returns to Chelsea a decade after her Gold Medal-winning DMZ garden in 2012 – the design shines a light on how human survival is dependent on protecting these natural habitats.

The sloping garden recreates the primeval mountainside using 200 tons of rock from Aberdeenshire, and has been largely built by hand over three weeks. Many of the Korean

trees and plants have been grown in North Wales using seeds brought from Jirisan, nurtured, says Hwang, from seed by Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones of Crûg Farm Plants, who have been growing these cultivars over the past four decades.



About 1,500 medicinal plants thrive in unique microclimates on Mount Jiri

Key plants include *Angelica gigas*, *Schisandra chinensis* and *Hovenia dulcis*, along with *Codonopsis lanceolata* (the climbing bellflower) and *Polygonatum verticillatum*, or whorled Solomon's seal. Siberian ginseng (*Acanthopanax senticosus*) is joined by Korean wild ginseng. In all, the garden will feature about 300 woody plants, 3,000 herbaceous perennials and several unusual climbers.

“As someone who believes that nature is the origin of all art, I highly value the unique colours, lines and textures that plants possess,” says the environmental artist and designer. “Supporting the distinctive characteristics and the growing environments of plants is a way to participate in the work of nature. It is another form of art, in my opinion.”



'All the environmental and mental problems that we face in our lives today are caused by our alienation or distance from nature,' says Hwang | CREDIT: Clara Molden

Standing amid it all is a 16ft-tall South Korean herb-drying tower, traditionally used to preserve the precious plants and constructed for Chelsea in coppiced oak, manure, hay and clay by Alex Gibbons, the Cumbria-based craftsman and clay specialist.

“I wanted to tell a story of symbiosis between the diversity and sustainability of plant ecology and conservation. All the environmental and mental problems that we face in our lives today are caused by our alienation or distance from nature,” says Hwang. “I have a small voice, but Chelsea gives me the chance to shout louder.”

The Biophilic Garden Otsu – Hanare by Kazuyuki Ishihara



Time out: this jewel-box space highlights the need to take a break from our busy lives

The jewel-box perfection of Kazuyuki Ishihara's intensely planted dreamworlds make them a must-see. For this year's show – his first since 2019 – the Japanese designer returns with a design that highlights biophilia, an innate affinity with the natural world.

Central to his scheme is a hanare – a wooden structure with a lattice screen that allows light to stream in – which provides a direct connection with the nature outside, where a waterfall is surrounded by irises, ferns and a dazzling low canopy of acers that circle the garden.

Rocks and Ishihara's signature moss balls edge pools at the front of the garden. The space highlights the need to take a break from our busy lives and spend time fully immersed in nature.

Myeloma UK Garden by Chris Beardshaw



The delicate design features two neoclassical temples for contemplation and seclusion

Chris Beardshaw built his first show garden 25 years ago, and since then has won 14 Gold Medals. This year, he is back on Main Avenue with the Myeloma UK Garden, an unapologetically beautiful garden of two halves.

A colourful sunny border is planted with traditional English garden favourites, while woodland areas sit in the shade of a *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* tree, along with *Ginkgo biloba*, *Acer tataricum* and varieties of *Cornus kousa*. The design also features two neoclassical temples for contemplation and seclusion, and a reflective pool circled with ferns, hostas and irises that will also reflect the layers of canopy trees, sky, clouds and passing wildlife.

Narrow charred-oak paths nod to the journey patients diagnosed with myeloma – a rare blood cancer – must take, but the garden is a space designed for appreciating nature with “little cameos” of exquisite planting dotted throughout. For Beardshaw, it’s about the joy of the garden, but also its delicate fragility that reminds us to enjoy the moment.



Chris Beardshaw is a 14-time Gold Medal winner

The National Brain Appeal’s “Rare Space” Sanctuary Garden by Charlie Hawkes

For those living with non-memory led dementias, moving through a space can be a challenging experience, and Charlie Hawkes’s design responds to this with a simple layout and bold shapes.

His Rare Space Garden guides visitors through three seating areas with shelters, which are further emphasised with three *Parrotia persica* trees and repeated plantings. Up to 2,000 plants will include *Rosa glauca* with its elegant silvery foliage and rose pink flowers, and swathes of the billowy lush green *Hakonechloa macra* to soften the edges.

The planting palette will include pink, purple, blue and red, including *Astrantia* ‘Burgundy Manor’ and the scented *Chloranthus sessilifolius* ‘Domino’ with its deep olive

to black foliage. Hawkes gardened at both Great Dixter and the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan, before working with Tom Stuart-Smith for three years and then setting up his own practice in 2021.

After the show, the garden will be temporarily relocated to the 200-acre Exbury Gardens estate in Hampshire and then on to its final home at the world's first rare dementia support centre near Queen Square, London.

Boodles British Craft Garden by Tom Hoblyn



This design draws on a romanticised idea of a woodland glade, incorporating a variety of artisan skills

One of this year's Sanctuary Gardens, the Boodles British Craft Garden by Tom Hoblyn celebrates artisan skills. An arbour with a branchlike framework and metal "leaf" roof has been created by Cox London, while water sculptor Bamber Wallis has designed a central floating steel pool that uses hydraulic pressure points to create a raindrop effect.

Interior designer Rachel Chudley has brought together craftspeople including fine-art thread painter Amelia Dennigan, who has embroidered lichen and moss onto cushions, and Matthew Pack, who has carved a wooden love seat. The garden draws on a romanticised idea of a woodland glade.

Pre-Raphaelite paintings with their intense reverence for nature have inspired the planting palette here, with pinks, ultramarine, claret and acid-yellow flowers set against a backdrop of cut-leaf alder and weeping birch trees. The rambling rose 'Félicité Perpétue'

clammers up over the arbour, while drifts of grasses and zingy lime-green *Euphorbia robbiae* will shimmer below around paths built in fossilised Chatsworth stone.

The Royal Entomological Society Garden by Tom Massey



A Bug's Life: a laser-cut steel dome is based on an insect eye

Materials will be a talking point in Tom Massey's Royal Entomological Society Garden, which aims to ignite our interest in insect life. Inspired by the rich biodiversity often found in neglected brownfield sites, the design centres around a laser-cut steel dome based on an insect eye and providing a lab in which to learn about the insects all around us.

Rammed earth floors, hoggin paths, gabion walls topped with logged sections, and many textural mulches (sand, brush, wood, leaf mould) all provide useful habitats, while dead wood – a big trend at this year's show – appears in tree form as well as broken up into sculptural talking points. Streams and pools add another layer of insect-friendly features.

The garden provokes us to think about what we plant, what materials we use and how we manage our gardens, and planting will be similarly wild, with hawthorn, Scots pine and birch trees, plus foxgloves and wildflowers including *Echium vulgare*. It's Massey's third outing at Chelsea and the garden will be relocated to the IQL Stratford in east London after the show.



This will be Tom Massey's third outing at Chelsea | CREDIT: Wax London

Great Pavilion

Speciality Corner Nursery Collective

For the first time at Chelsea, a co-operative of small nurseries has joined forces with eight members of the Plant Fairs Roadshow (a collection of growers from across the south of England) to form the Speciality Corner. The nurseries include Daisy Roots from Hertfordshire, Fleur de Lys of West Sussex, Plantbase from Kent, and Chelsea newcomers such as Miles Japanese Maples, Pelham Plants from Lewes, and the No Name Nursery from Kent. Each nursery will have a 22 square foot space and a shared central hub.

Raymond Evison