

*Featured in*

# GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

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## In brief

**Name** Walled Garden Treberfydd.

**What** Nursery in an old walled kitchen garden.

**Where** Powys.

**Soil** Heavy clay.

**Climate** Cloudy, wet and windy; generally mild, but a frost pocket in winter.

**Hardiness ratings** USDA 9b.





**This page** *Veronica longifolia*

'Pink Eveline' produces large spikes of pinkish-white flowers from midsummer.

**Opposite page** Inspirational containers

outside a small café offer a taster of Treberfydd's vast range of plants.

# Welsh renaissance

Reviving a derelict walled garden in the Brecon Beacons, Treberfydd nursery specialises in beautiful hardy plants grown on site

WORDS KRISTY RAMAGE PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

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hree-and-a-half years ago, Alison Sparshatt saw an advert for the sale of a 'derelict plant nursery in a walled garden'. The business she bought was in a beautiful location, but was little more than waist-high weeds, old polytunnels and five commercial greenhouses. There were no plants of value, save an ancient fig and a couple of apple trees. It had been a nursery where bedding plants were brought in, 'fattened up' and sold on, the indigenous soil and location having no bearing on what was grown, and there was no propagation at all.

Not to be deterred, Alison saw the potential to create a very different kind of nursery within the handsome stone walls, selling hardy plants grown on site, in conjunction with an exciting garden where she could trial plants and show how to combine them. This juxtaposition of plants, the mix of colour and form, creating different moods and garden areas, is something she wants to develop further. Here is a nurserywoman who understands that a garden is much more than a collection of plants; it is the space plants inhabit and the way in which they are brought together that transforms them from individual specimens into a garden with the depth to stir our emotions.

After taking away all of the polytunnels and half of the greenhouses, Alison set about improving the soil, installing 12 huge compost bins alongside one nettle and two comfrey beds. The nursery now produces most of the compost needed for mulching. The thick, annual mulch, along with 20 metric tons of well-rotted manure a year, has

transformed the clay into a friable soil that can now be hoed.

The main criteria for her choice of plants is that Alison has to be passionate about them. They are selected for the quality of their flower and foliage, and architectural structure, or their use as an edible or herb. Plants have been sourced from lots of small specialist nurseries, but have also arrived from all sorts of gardening friends. Among her immaculately labelled plants are those named after the person who donated them. The occasional puzzled customer will ask about a phlox labelled as having come from so-and-so down the road. Alison will answer, "Well, it's a beautiful form that has been growing successfully in that garden for 20 years, which is a better guarantee that it will do well in this climate than a named variety propagated in France and untested in our ground."

It is from those trusted nurseries and gardeners that Alison has gained so much knowledge about the plants she grows. From the outset, as a newcomer to the nursery world (if not to gardening), she has been led by her pragmatic nature and curiosity to explore different methods of propagation and growing, learning from experience and the experience of others. She would like to extend that generous sharing of knowledge to her customers. Here you can ask about that difficult corner in dry shade, and the suggestions will come bubbling out, the character of the plants described in as much detail as if they were friends, their foibles explained, and a hint of fond pride coming through in her account of the beautiful show that they will produce. □

Turn the page for 19 of Alison's favourite plants.

**1** In the nursery beds Alison creates combinations of plants to show how they perform in the deep borders. Here she has combined a mix of *Astrantia major* 'Rubra' and the chocolate-leaved *Geranium* 'Dusky Crûg'; with the leaf of *Pulmonaria rubra*, and *Actaea simplex* 'Brunette'.

**2** Alongside cut flowers and edible produce, garden-inspired artwork and antiques are for sale in the nursery shop. This flower lamp is by Colin Chetwood.

**3** The edibles grown in the nursery have revived the spirit of the kitchen garden, which originally supplied vegetables to the Raikes family who lived at Treberfydd House.

**4** Within the structure of an old greenhouse, a formal pond for water plants sits between raised beds full of annuals including *Nigella* and one of Alison's favourites, the fabulous white corncockle *Agrostemma githago* 'Ocean Pearl'.

**5** In large planters the woolly grey-white stems of *Phlomis italica*, happily associate with *Stachys byzantina* and the intense spots of colours provided by *Knautia macedonica* and *Dianthus carthusianorum*.

**6** Creating raised beds with good drainage has been essential for growing unusual herbs. Only those plants that are stunning and have excellent culinary or medical uses make it into these beds.



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# 19 of Alison's top picks

## 1 *Erysimum 'Bowles's Mauve'*

Long-flowering evergreen shrub with marvellous slate-green foliage. Rich, mauve flowers from March to November, if not all year round. Likes well-drained soil and full sun. 75cm. AGM\*. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b<sup>†</sup>.

## 2 *Crambe cordifolia*

Bold, architectural plant. Dark-green basal foliage, with tall, branching sprays of tiny, white, deliciously scented flowers from June to August. Prefers well-drained soil in sun or partial shade 1.8m. AGM. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.

## 3 *Malva sylvestris* var. *mauritiana*

### 'Bibor Felho'

Gorgeous, dark-purple flowers resembling crinkled tissue, which unfurl in May and keep emerging right through until October. Big, soft leaves and strong, vertical stems. Likes well-drained soil in full sun and a sheltered spot. 2m. USDA 4a-8b.

## 4 *Allium sativum* var. *ophioscorodon*

Commonly known as serpent garlic. Linear, grey-green leaves. Umbels of pinkish-white flowers are borne on flower stalks that are initially coiled like a snake before straightening out. Likes moist, but well-drained soil in sun. 60cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

\*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. Hardiness ratings given where available.



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### 5 *Centranthus ruber 'Albus'*

Semi-evergreen, grey-green leaves. Erect clusters of white, lightly scented flowers from spring to autumn. Self-seeds freely, but needs well-drained soil in full sun. 80cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.

### 6 *Linum grandiflorum*

Scarlet flowers from June to September over airy green foliage. A perfect annual. Likes well-drained soil in full sun. 50cm. AGM.

### 7 *Geranium 'Dusky Crûg'*

Delicious, dark-chocolate-purple, mound-forming foliage. Delicate, pale-pink flowers from May to September. Needs moist, well-drained soil in sun or partial shade. 30cm.

### 8 *Stachys officinalis*

Upright perennial, commonly known as betony or bishop's wort. Produces early, dark-green, scallop-edged, basal leaves and then dense, purple flower spikes from June to September. Prefers moist, well-drained soil and sun. 60cm. RHS H7, USDA 4a-9b.

### 9 *Salvia 'Blue Note'*

Compact shrub with small, intensely blue flowers and scented leaves. Long flowering season, from June to October. Prefers moist, well-drained soil in sun. 60cm.

### 10 *Galega officinalis 'Alba'*

Commonly known as goat's rue 'Alba'. Robust, bushy perennial with bright-green divided leaves. Long, pure-white flower racemes all summer and early autumn. A good plant for cut-flower arrangements. 1.5m. RHS H7, USDA 3a-9b.

### 11 *Salvia 'Nachtvlinder'*

Erect, aromatic, shrubby perennial with dark-green leaves and velvety plum-purple flowers. Long flowering season from June to October. Needs moist, well-drained soil in sun. 75cm. AGM. RHS H5.

### 12 *Dahlia merckii*

A hardy and very pretty single dahlia with tall, wiry stems over smooth, glossy foliage. Produces small, airy, lavender-pink flowers from June to September. Will thrive in well-drained soil in either sun or partial shade. 1.2m. USDA 7b-11.

Turn the page for more favourite plants.

### 13 *Sisyrinchium striatum*

Evergreen perennial with grey-green, sword-shaped leaves. Has erect stems with clusters of pale-yellow flowers in summer. Likes well-drained soil in full sun. 40cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.



### 14 *Salvia sclarea* var. *turkestanica*

Biennial with large, aromatic leaves. Produces pale-mauve flowers on pinkish-white bracts from June to September. Likes well-drained soil in full sun. 1.2m. USDA 5a-9b.



### 15 *Astrantia major* 'Rubra'

Attractive, early clump-forming basal leaves. Long-flowering, dark, pink flower umbels from June to September. 90cm. USDA 4a-7b.



### 16 *Cynara cardunculus* var. *scolymus*

Architectural, silver-grey foliage. Edible flower buds followed by purple, thistle-like flowers. 2m. RHS H5, USDA 7a-10b.



### 17 *Echium vulgare*

A strikingly beautiful biennial with bristly, spotted leaves and stems, and bright-blue flower spikes from June to August. Drought resistant and bee-friendly. 1m. RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.



### 18 *Dianthus carthusianorum*

Tall delicate stems of deep-pink flowers over dark-green, grassy foliage. Likes well-drained soil in sun. 75cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.



### 19 *Phlomis italicica*

Evergreen shrub with woolly, grey-green sage-like leaves. Beautiful, hooded, lilac flowers all summer. 1m. RHS H4.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

**Address** Walled Garden Treberfydd, Llangasty, Brecon, Powys LD3 7PX.

**Tel** 01874 730169.

**Web** [walledgardentreberfydd.com](http://walledgardentreberfydd.com)

**Open** March to October, daily, 10am-5pm; November to February, Tuesday – Saturday, 10am to 4pm.

- Designers Sarah Price and Noël Kingsbury are running a one-day masterclass on selecting and composing with plants at the Walled Garden, Treberfydd on 21 June, 10am-4pm, price £90. Visit [gardenmasterclass.org](http://gardenmasterclass.org) for more details.

## 5 lessons from Treberfydd

1 Plant teasels and leave the seedheads to create winter structure and please the birds. The sight of goldfinches feeding on the seeds brings as much delight as the flowers themselves.

2 Learn from your own experience and that of others, and experiment with where you plant things. Be observant and pragmatic; if something doesn't work well in one location, you can usually move it.

3 When propagating your own plants, take a belt-and-braces approach, and sow your seed in both autumn and spring if possible. You'll then be covered if one of the batches fails.

4 Understanding the etymology of plant names will increase your knowledge of plants and how they behave. Even a little knowledge of Latin is hugely useful to gardeners.

5 Self-seeding plants that are true to form are a gift. The seedlings that germinate will be tougher than any seedlings you could have collected. If you don't want them, timely mulching will suppress them.

