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BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING PERIOD HOMES MAGAZINE

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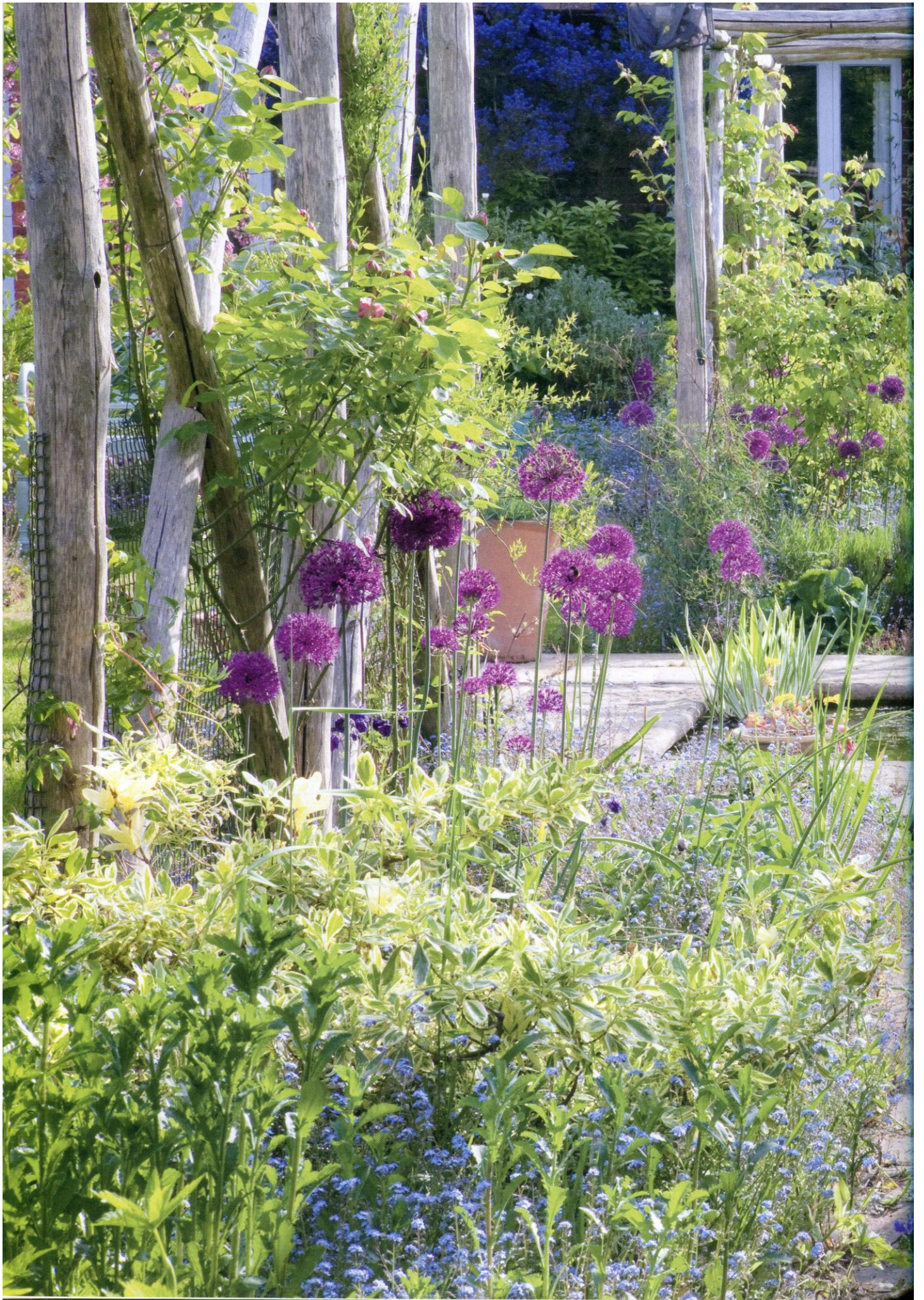


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Floral melody

Sue Martin's delightful cottage garden brims with the bright tones of her National Collection of dainty geums planted among a delicate medley of hues

Words and photographs Leigh Clapp

Allium hollandicum
'Purple Sensation'
spheres dance in the breeze with mixed tulips above massed forget-me-nots and *Centaurea nigra*, framed by the chestnut pergola. All this is accompanied by the delicate music of water tumbling from the small fountain feature



KEY FACTS

Character A plantswoman's cottage garden, with flowing, harmonious planting that works with the natural rhythm of the seasons and contains a National Collection of geums

Size Just under a quarter of an acre

Aspect South and south-west facing

Soil Wealden clay soil, improved by previous owners since the 1900s, with a good layer of friable fertile soil. Sue also adds grit to improve drainage

Owner Sue Martin, a cellist and retired cello teacher, who has lived here since 1989

House 1850s Victorian terraced cottage

Open 1 Brickwall Cottages, Frittenden, Kent TN17 2DH. Opens in aid of the National Garden Scheme by arrangement from April to June (ngs.org.uk)

Over the course of the past 32 years, retired cello teacher Sue Martin has gradually created an intimate, delightfully personal garden brimming with colour and life. A mature mixed hedge, only knee-high when she moved to the property, now encloses the L-shaped garden, which stretches out from behind her cottage in the little village of Frittenden. 'When I arrived, the garden was like a goldfish bowl in the middle of the village, and looked more like an allotment, planted with well-tended vegetables, grassy paths and a central fruit cage,' Sue recalls. But once cleared, the less than a quarter-acre garden was a blank canvas, ready to be transformed.

'The previous owners, whose family had lived here since World War I, had improved the heavy yellow clay soil by adding farmyard manure and lime. As a result there is a good layer of friable fertile soil, and once plants have their roots down into it they grow extremely well,' Sue explains. This is clear to see in the curvaceous flowerbeds now brimming with blooms, with grassy paths snaking between them. To give privacy and structure, Sue planted trees and shrubs, including hawthorn and holly hedges, a row of pleached *Tilia platyphyllos* 'Rubra' limes on the side and a lovely *Cercis canadensis* on the lawn, which is draped in pink blossom in May. A small formal pond near the house, accompanied by a coppiced chestnut pergola walk, add linear perspective.

Linking the two garden areas is a pergola arch, flanked on both sides by deep curving beds planted in tones of soft blue from clumps of *Iris sibirica*,



and silver-foliaged screening shrubs, such as the scented *Elaeagnus* 'Quicksilver'. It makes a pretty entrance to the second section of the garden and allows glimpses of what lies beyond. One large area has been divided into quarters with curving, low box hedging for a touch of formality to enclose herbs and flowers, and four raised beds built and planned for crops. A lovely old gnarled 'Beauty of Bath' apple tree, the only tree that was on the land when Sue arrived, has remained a feature and is perfect to sit under for a bit of shade in summer, backed with clusters of cascading blooms from the beauty bush, *Kolkwitzia amabilis* 'Pink Cloud'.

The garden has evolved organically over the years into a pretty, informal style; full of plants, but with no set plan and simply embracing Sue's love of gardening, which she learned from her mother and grandmother. 'I tended to collect lots of plants and then I would gradually make beds for >



Far left: Sue grows geums for sale through mail order and at her open days (geumcollection.co.uk)
Left: Pretty cottage planting with its harmonious combinations and sprinkling throughout of geums, such as here with one of Sue's favourites 'Prinses Juliana', perfectly sets off the house
Above: Stately *Iris* 'Apollo' sits among massed geum seedlings and the repeated presence of spontaneous, self-seeded blue forget-me-nots
Right: A rustic arch links the two garden areas and is softened by a jumble of informal planting that includes irises, forget-me-nots, geums, knapweed and aquilegias





them; it was a bit of hit and miss,' Sue explains. Hardy perennials really fascinated her, and so she joined the local Hardy Plant Society in the 1980s. It was reading Beth Chatto's *Garden Notebook*, however, that sparked the particular plant passion that informs this garden. 'I was inspired to do a yellow border, and when looking around for something suitable bought a deep yellow *Geum montanum*. It seemed perfect, but not knowing much about geums then, I didn't realise that it is an alpine plant and it didn't like sitting in heavy Wealden clay, so it soon disappeared,' Sue explains. 'Then I saw *Geum* 'Prinses Juliana', and although I didn't think I liked orange at first, it has been wonderful as it flowers and flowers and was much more successful. I gradually found other geums; whenever I saw one on a stall I would buy it, mostly from the Hardy Plant Society's plant sales,' she continues.

As there aren't many geum cultivars available in garden centres, Sue visited Alison Mallet, who held a National Collection in Devon, and when Alison decided she could no longer cope she asked

Sue to take on the collection. She became a National Collection holder in 2006, and today has 119 different cultivars meticulously recorded, with some for sale in her small nursery on site.

'I enjoy geums because most of them are all flowering at the same time, so it becomes a real high point of the year. I love the colours; they are not just one hard colour but have lots of different tones within. I like the brightness, effect and variety, as well as their evergreen leaves in winter. The different forms are just fascinating,' says Sue.

Geums fill the garden, mingling with perennials and annuals in flowerbeds, and planted en masse in a sea of forget-me-nots in the four raised beds that were once destined for vegetables, but now just one on a rotational basis is used to grow some beans, herbs and lettuces.

Planting combinations are a little bit random, with a spontaneous charm that is quite enchanting as this garden is filled casually with exuberant, much cherished plants. 'I now grow a lot of annuals, which I hadn't before as the beds are full of perennials – with choices such as ammi,





In the area

GREAT DIXTER HOUSE AND GARDENS, Northiam, East Sussex TN31 6PH. Famous and influential garden by Christopher Lloyd. Open April to November, Monday–Saturday. Entry adult £14.30, child £4.40. (greatdixter.co.uk)

HOLE PARK GARDENS, Rolvenden, Kent TN17 4JA. Woodland garden with carpets of bluebells. Open spring to October. Entry adult £9, child £1. (Tel: 01580 241344; holepark.com)

SISSINGHURST CASTLE GARDEN, Sissinghurst, Kent TN17 2AB. Iconic garden of Vita Sackville-West. Open daily. Entry from adult £8, child £4. (Tel: 01580 710700; nationaltrust.org.uk)

MADRONA NURSERY, Bethersden, Kent TN26 3EG. Suppliers of unusual shrubs and perennials. (Tel: 01233 820100; madrone.co.uk)

Other nurseries supplying geums

HARDY'S COTTAGE GARDEN PLANTS, Whitchurch, Hamps RG28 7FA (hardysplants.co.uk)

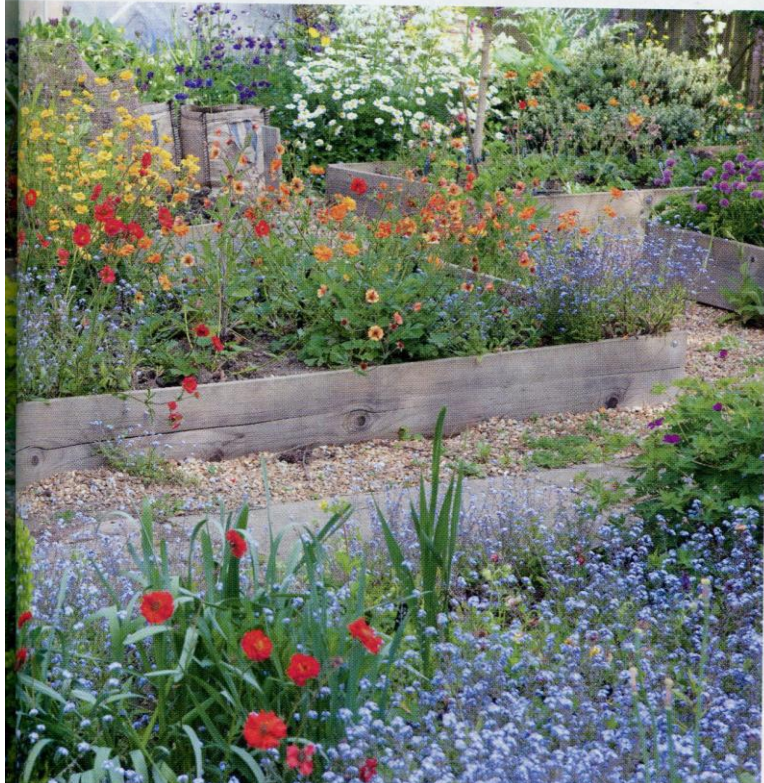
BEECHES NURSERY, Ashdon, Essex, CB10 2HB (beechesnursery.co.uk)

EAST OF EDEN NURSERY, Carlisle, Cumbria CA4 9QN (east-of-eden-nursery.co.uk)

NORWELL NURSERIES, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG23 6JX (norwellnurseries.co.uk)




Left: There is such a charmingly artless atmosphere and rhythm to the garden as you wander the paths, admiring the jostle of plants and jewel-like constancy of tiny geums, or sit awhile under the branches of the old, gnarled apple tree
Below: Many of the geums are grown in raised beds that were originally intended for vegetables, their vibrant notes mingling with lime green *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* and bright blue forget-me-nots



cosmos, rudbeckias, larkspur and antirrhinum. The self-seeding can be a bit too prolific and needs thinning out to avoid congested beds. *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* has seeded all round the garden from one baby plant and there are ox-eye daisies everywhere,' she smiles.

In mid-spring there are also tulips popping up, spires of *Allium* 'Purple Sensation', Dutch iris, promiscuous aquilegia, and centaurea, adding to the repeated visual link of sunny geums and the froth of forget-me-nots.

Sue starts off with the tulips in pots then plants them out into the garden the following year with many reappearing. Later in the season, salvias, dahlias and chrysanthemums continue the show. 'The aim is for continuous planting along the lines of the Great Dixter design,' she adds.

As the garden continues to evolve, curvaceous beds will continue to encroach further on the lawns, as new plants need to be accommodated in this floral melody. 'I can't resist plants and keep needing to find a home for the new arrivals,' Sue adds. 'They are what inspire me.' 



**Sue's five favourite
geums to include**

ABOVE LEFT: GEUM 'RED WINGS' – double or semi-double flowers

ABOVE RIGHT: G. 'PRINSES JULIANA' – deep orange semi-double flowers

RIGHT: G. RIVALE 'DEEP ROSE' – flowers in shade from spring to mid-summer

BELOW LEFT: G. 'HILLTOP BEACON' – very vigorous grower with a single, soft orange flower

BELOW RIGHT: G. 'DAWN' – flowers from April to November

