

INFORMATION and HISTORY

CUPANI GARDEN at 8 Sandgate Close, Seaford

History

The house was built in the 1950's and we moved here in 1982 and started work on the garden in 1990. The front and back garden was just poor quality lawn, with two old apple trees, two Willows and 12 Leylandii along the back fence. It used to take over two hours to just cut the grass and this was never satisfying as there was nothing else to look at! Over the years we have gradually taken up parts of the grass and created the flower beds and borders. We have taken out all of the Leylandii – this was a complicated decision to make but was absolutely the right one. We had worried about losing the screen that they provided from the houses at the back but we are very happy with our new screen of trees. Our replacement trees¹ are all suitable for our climate and soil type and provide interest throughout the year.. Spring 2012 saw the addition of another greenhouse and a complete renovation of an old compost heap so that we now have a series of compost bins which have increased our compost making. The garage has been rebuilt and we have created a cutting garden in some liberated space.

More changes occurred when getting the garden ready for openings in 2016. The old plant sale area by the greenhouse had many uneven surfaces that were dangerous for us and visitors and we had a row of trees in danger of crashing into the greenhouse which have now been removed. A raised planter filled with Portuguese Laurel two years on it is now providing a modest screen. The path to the greenhouse and the old shingle area were brick paved and although on a gentle slope provide a new place to sit and eat cake. Raised beds were added to the old cut flower patch and by the time visitors arrive it should be a riot of colour provided by annuals, climbers, roses and cutting perennials. Further down the long border a new seating area was built and the plant sale area has moved to the tree area.

In the autumn of 2017 we made the drastic decision to take everything out of the top two thirds of the long border, it had become very choked with some invasive plants and some plants got buried in amongst it all. So in 2018 you see a young border reestablishing itself. A number of the structural plants were planted here from elsewhere in the garden (Olive, Holly, Cardoon, and Melianthus). In April 2018 we moved plants from the area in front of the summerhouse to create an additional seating area.

The front garden had started to look neglected with a dying hedge and although the pots provided great colour and interest they were hard to maintain in very dry weather. We now have a newly planted border and fence, which although still a bit raw will fill out in the years to come. The old 1950's concrete path has been replaced around the front of the house and the raised bed built. This is replanted two or three times a year. Summer bedding; autumn interest and spring bulbs. A new gate leads you into the main garden.

At the far end of the garden where people used to have their tea or lunch it had become quite hazardous with a increasing slope and tree roots so a new deck now provides a more comfortable area for refreshments. For returning visitors you will notice the addition of two new windmills and some other garden art and a lovely new water wall.

¹ All trees were purchased from the English Woodland Centre near Heathfield, www.ewburrownursery.co.uk

The Garden – Courtyard and Cutting Garden

As you enter through the gate, on the right is a courtyard garden², our 2010 project. The courtyard is a gentle place to sit in the morning and evening (the sun can be a bit fierce in the afternoon) and the soothing sounds from the water feature³ add to the tranquility. The seats and the screen in this area were made locally⁴. The stunning new wind sculpture was bought at Chelsea this year from Light Innovation Ltd.⁵

From the courtyard you have a choice of two routes either down the long path towards the summer house⁶ or towards the gazebo.⁷

Route to the summer house

Following the route to the summer house the garden plots have different themes of planting. To the right of the path is traditional perennial planting; to the left are more shade tolerant plants and a mix of colours with reds and orange dominating the summer months.

The right hand border is broken up with two seating areas⁸. The first was added in (2011). We created this as there is a nice view from this point but it also provides some practical help in maintaining the long border. We added two Hibiscus bushes to either side of the bench & we change the plants in the large grey pots 2/3 times a year. At various points in this border there are clumps of Japanese Anemone which have a lovely family provenance. We brought them to Seaford from Aunt Sheelah's garden in Kent and she brought her original plant from my maternal grandfather's house in Dublin in the 1950's; he in turn had apparently taken his plant from a house he had in County Wicklow in the 1930/40's. We have grown very fond of Geums (growing them from seed) and although they start flowering in May we hope they are still flowering for our open gardens in June. (At the time of writing we are not sure if they have become one of the snow casualties.)

The second small bed on the left of the path is mostly green and white but some odd colours may have crept in here as a result of some label malfunctions in the winter (don't use pencil on wooden plant labels!). The end bit of the long border on the right now becomes a bit wild, not because of neglect but because it is a wonderful spring garden, but we have then allowed a number of plants to self-seed. Echim grown from seed produced magnificent flower heads in 2016 and 2017 and we are hopeful for repeat performance in 2018. (although we lost 6 specimens in the Winter) Step inside the summer house if you would like to see a plan of the garden drawn by Lindsay Thomas in 2012.⁹ If you want

² The courtyard was designed by Matt Boynton and built by James and Jason from Masonry construction. More recent hard Landscaping has been undertaken by Dan from Ace of Spades on 07710 151972

³ Water feature supplied by Fishy Business at Hillier's near Stone Cross, 01323847868

⁴ Studio Forge in Offham – www.studioforge.co.uk

⁵ Light innovation Ltd – www.lightinnovation.com

⁶ Supplied by Neptune Spas at Hillier's – www.neptunespasltd.co.uk and built by a local decking firm All around the Garden www.allaroundthegarden.co.uk

⁸ Again bench and obelisks are from our favourite blacksmiths at Studio Forge in Offham

⁹ Lindsay Thomas – email Lindsay@orchardhousedesigns.co.uk

shade have your afternoon tea here and browse the gardening books. There are also a few magazines in here with features on our garden.

Route to the Gazebo from the Courtyard

To the right of this path is a lovely lime green Philadelphus just before you enter the arch¹⁰ planted with Wisteria. Once through the arch the right hand side is dominated by the Zebra Grass at this time of year but in spring it is full of Tulips and Primroses. The left hand bed is a shade garden which again is spectacular in the spring with Primroses and Primulas, Hellebores, Anemones, in the summer ferns and foxgloves fill this area. The Gazebo itself is covered in an early flowering clematis Montana, honeysuckle and a winter flowering Jasmine.

House decking area to sheds and the back route

The two beds in front of the house deck provide us with winter colour and are an absolute joy in the spring when the Snowdrops herald the start of the new cycle. From late January through to May we have Hellebores in both beds to look forward to and then Daffodils and Tulips follow. Before these are finished the colour is provided by the perennial Geraniums and then the in-between season sees the buds start to open on the Peony, Aconitum and Zantedeschia.

Turn right at the end of this path and you pass the sheds on your left and will see the fernery on your right, the main feature being the Dicksonia Antarctica tree fern. This is our shade area and in the spring it is full of Primroses and Bluebells and Anemones. Walk through the tree area and have a seat in shade for a while and listen to the birdsong.

The Greenhouse(s) & Frames

This is our propagation area and apart from the cucumbers, and a few other special plants the rest of the plants are our stock plants that are for sale on the stands in the tree area. Most plants for sales are propagated from plants in the garden or grown from seed and occasionally from bought plugs that are potted on. We have a nice range of climbers and shrubs this year bought at the Heathfield plant auction¹¹. In late summer Gloriosa Rothschild and Gingers provide a vibrant splash of colour in the greenhouse. Our propagation ability has been enhanced this year by a magnificent hydroponic propagator.

Sweet Peas

Most visitors who come back to the garden always comment on the Sweet Peas and when Amateur Gardening decided to do a feature on our garden (published in February 2012) this was what they decided to focus on, Sussex Life published an article on the garden in 2014. We usually buy the seed at the Chelsea flower show¹² and plant the seeds in September in long biodegradable pots in the greenhouse. We also buy seeds from Easton Walled Garden in Lincolnshire¹³ and from the wonderful Ben at Higgledy Seeds.¹⁴ Shoots appear quickly and by the end of November we will have pricked out the tops.

Kept in the unheated greenhouse nothing much happens until February when they then start to put on growth and we stake them with 24 inch canes. Any tips from visitors always welcome. Ironically, after deciding to rename the garden Cupani our first autumn sowing had very poor germination, but the later sowing was great. We were away for most of

¹⁰ Another lovely Studio Forge creation

¹¹ Watsons Auctioneers – www.watsonsauctioneers.co.uk

¹² Sweet peas, Chelsea Collection from www.eaglesweetpeas.co.uk

¹³ Easton Walled garden – www.eastonwalledgardens.co.uk

¹⁴ Higgledy Seeds – www.higgledygarden.com

the winter months so only planted the bulk of the sweet pea seeds in March. I would say we are about a month behind those that we normally plant in September/October.

Suppliers and final words

One of the best suppliers of seed I have found is from Higgledy Seeds, where seeds can be ordered easily on line and are delivered quickly. The excellent website has very entertaining growing guides. If you are a twitter user why not follow Ben and Flash the dog who provide great photos and entertainment from Cornwall. @higgledygarden or on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Higgledy-Garden-170514296298765/?ref=ts>

To reduce product miles and to support local business we try to use artisans who are Sussex based, we recycle as much as we can, don't use peat based compost and are now finally producing enough of our own compost to keep us going most years (although we are still working on how not to transfer weeds and unwanted perennial seeds into the beds and pots). We still buy John Innes for seedlings. We have given web addresses for most of the people who supplied products or work in the garden. If you have bought plants or jam from us we will happily take back pots and jam jars if you live locally.(we will give you 10p per pot if you return pots and jam jars to us). We are very mindful about the amount of plastic used in the garden and are trying to eradicate any 'one time only' plastic from the garden and from our food preparation. We will fill up your water bottle and will supply filtered water and glasses rather than bottled water during our openings. If we use disposable utensils they will be biodegradable.

The charities we are supporting this year will really benefit from your generosity and we would like to say enjoy the garden, find us and ask questions, sit and relax with a cuppa and some homemade cake and if you can please buy some plants, jam and or books. It would be great if you could complete a Trip Advisor review on your visit.

We raised £5,721 in 2017 (and £1,700 of this was match funded) so £7421. We also contributed to two garden trails and their fundraising efforts. A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VISITORS

2019Plans

We will need to replace a shed (woodworm) and would like to continue our revamping of some of the beds.

Open by Appointment

Throughout June and July the garden is open by appointment on some weekdays and several weekends and can be booked for groups of up to 20 at a time. If you want to have a private afternoon tea or lunch event this is a perfect location. We even make Birthday Cakes if given a few weeks' notice. All profits from the 'by Appointment Days' will be given to the organizations we support, including Stay Up Late see our website for garden updates and opening times. www.cupanigarden.com

Plant Sales

We are happy to sell plants to anyone from Easter onwards each year, just give us a ring or watch out for Facebook adverts.

Aideen and Denis Jones (revised April 2018)

