



Summer garden



Lavender



Euphorbia Mellifera



Dicentra Scandens and Hydrangea Annabelle

Flourish & Grow

Award winning gardener, Geoff Stonebanks shares advice on how to create a garden for the senses and for wellbeing

After a spring of highs and lows, we can now look forward to the coming summer months, where we can, hopefully, flourish and grow in the warmer climes and recharge our batteries. Where better place to do that than in the garden?

To “flourish and grow” signifies thriving, prospering, and developing in a healthy way, and working in your garden can definitely achieve that in my book! Just as plants require water and nutrients, flourishing requires pruning negative energies and providing mental and emotional nourishment for yourself too!

The art of flourishing is about more than just achieving success or happiness, it's also about growing and developing, and living a life that's rich with meaning and purpose. In my opinion, you can create a life that's truly fulfilling by creating an outdoor space that will, in turn allow you to prosper, bloom and blossom too.

A space that tantalizes

How about creating a space that tantalizes the senses? Because there is a lot that you can do in a garden, especially around the senses of sound, scent and touch.

A garden for the senses

Fragrant plants can add a whole new dimension to the enjoyment of your garden. They are ideal plants for smaller gardens too, where the scent of their flowers or foliage can permeate the whole plot.

For the last few years, I've had a large trough of lavender growing alongside the large patio at the top of the garden. There are 3 *lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead' growing well. This is a popular, compact evergreen shrub, to 45cm tall, with aromatic, narrow, grey-green foliage and spikes of small, highly-fragrant, blue-purple flowers in mid to late summer. It's a great feature and being planted in a container means I can move it around the garden too if needed. A great bonus is that the plant is very drought tolerant as well.

Coronilla valentina glauca is a really pretty shrub that I have grown in both the front and back gardens. It will light up a sheltered position with an abundance of lemon-yellow, pea-like blooms. It flowers profusely from December through to mid spring and the sweetly scented blooms make this a useful shrub for bringing colour to those dull winter days. The small blue-green foliage is evergreen, providing a fine backdrop for its fragrant display and if lucky, it will flower again in the summer.

This versatile shrub is perfectly hardy in most UK locations, but performs particularly well in a sheltered, sunny spot, even in difficult coastal areas like my garden on the south coast. Its compact, rounded habit makes it ideal for borders and patio



Coronilla Glauca

The question I have been asked most since 2009, when I first opened my garden to the public is what the smell is at the end of the central path. Almost without exception, visitors think I'm growing cannabis there. Cannabis apparently has a distinct scent that can be a spicy, pleasant and rich aroma. Some varieties also have a sweet or fruity aroma. But I've never smelt it, let alone tried it, so I'm always thrown by their comments. The nearest plants to the area they highlight with a strong smell are euphorbia mellifera which offer up a honey flavoured smell. But I'm never quite sure if visitors believe me!

containers too. It can also be trained as a wall shrub for a spectacular upright display as well.

Hydrangea petiolaris is a great plant with pretty white flowers. This climbing hydrangea thrives in some of the most shady, inhospitable areas of the garden. It can be very slow to establish, but will eventually romp along a wall or fence, clinging by aerial roots. It's almost heart-shaped, dark green leaves turn yellow in autumn, and masses of showy, lacy, white flower heads appear in late spring and early summer. These stunning blooms are not only beautiful but also sweetly fragrant, making them a delightful addition to the garden.



Hydrangea Petiolaris

Listen carefully

Now, turning our thoughts to sounds in the garden, there can be no better background noise than the sound of tinkling water. Over time I have added several water features to my plot. The original garden had a large pond with 3 trickle ponds and I installed a fountain, not long after we moved in. This was replaced a couple of years ago by the gorgeous corten steel feature, which I always turn on when I'm working in the garden, even in the depths of winter, providing there is no ice on it, as I love to hear it running.



Corten Steel Pond and Fountain

Of course, scent and sound are not the only senses that can be appreciated in the garden, there are many plants that are really tactile too. By far my favourite is the stunning stipa tenuissima or pony tail grass. It is the perfect grass to plant alongside a path so you can stroke your hand across it as you pass.



Pony Tail Grass

A few showstoppers

By choosing plants that are good for the senses, you can improve your mood and general wellbeing. The sensory attributes of these plants allow people to engage with the environment around them in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to their mind and body. But if you're not that bothered with the senses and just want some showstoppers in your garden, why not consider a large pot of almost black Calla lilies? These stunning, deep maroon-purple, near-black flowers create a dramatic, exotic focal point. They thrive in sun to partial shade, from summer to autumn, perfect for containers or borders.

You could try some nerium oleander too. They have an exceptionally long flowering period plus handsome, evergreen leaves. They bear 5-petaled, tropical-looking, flowers that are borne in clusters at the ends of branches. They form a tall, bushy shrub with lance-shaped, leathery, grey-green foliage providing evergreen structure throughout the year. This half-hardy shrub is best grown in a patio container, where it can be easily moved into a sheltered position over winter. It can also be grown in the open ground in sheltered city gardens, coastal areas and mild parts of the UK. This vigorous, fast-growing shrub brings a Mediterranean vibe to the garden. Despite its showy looks it is a resilient performer in a sheltered spot, tolerating drought and salt spray.



Oleander

Another hot favourite are the delicate blooms of Dicentra scandens. This is an easy-to-grow perennial from the Himalayas, where it normally would scramble around in shrubberies. But it is actually a climber with tendrils, although it needs something to grow up such as a trellis or shrub. Foliage has a bronzy hue when young but turns brownish green when mature. Flowers are bright yellow and held in bunches on the upper parts of the stem.



Calla Lily

Geoff Stonebanks is a full member of the Gardening Media Guild. He is regularly heard on the radio and his own garden, Driftwood, has appeared on BBC's Gardeners' World and won multiple awards. You can find out more at: www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk

You can also book a visit to Geoff's garden, Driftwood at 4 Marine Drive, Seaford, BN25 2RS, by arrangement only, from 1st June through until the 2nd August again this summer: E-mail visitdriftwood@gmail.com

Visits include home-made teas in the garden with a choice of lemon Victoria sponge, coffee and walnut cake or gluten free pineapple polenta cake.

