

COTTAGE GARDENS

What are they? How do I create one?
Here are some of the best plants to
make a cottage garden:



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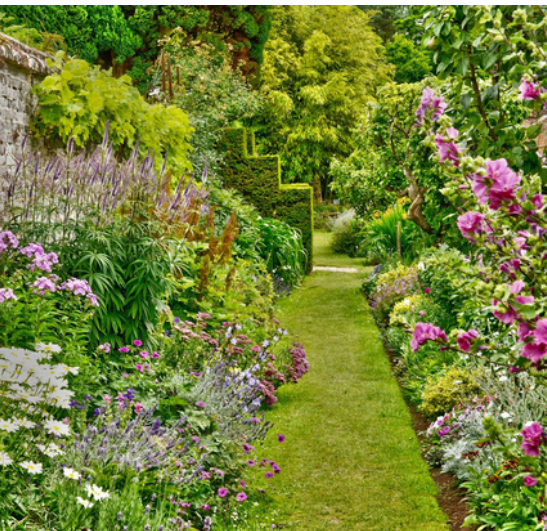
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Table of CONTENTS

03	Introduction
04 - 05	How to Create a Cottage Garden in 10 Easy Steps
06 - 07	Top 10 Plants for Cottage Gardens
08 - 09	Inspiration



INTRODUCTION



What is a cottage garden?

The 'cottage garden' is a quintessentially British garden and it's a natural, free-flowering area of plants which aims to always be colourful. The plants in this garden should all have a role to play at differing times of the year: producing flowers through spring and summer, displaying autumn colour and then, finally, contributing those beautiful, frosted stems - common with herbaceous plants - during the winter. It is designed to encourage wildlife, particularly our pollinators, which bring an extra layer of life to the garden.

What are the elements of a cottage garden?

Be bold and adventurous when planting a cottage garden; plants should be in drifts, grouped in numbers of odd denominations such as 3's, 5's, 7's or 9's. These drifts form full planting spaces and enhance the characteristics of each plant species. This full style of planting also has the added benefit of reducing maintenance work such as watering or weeding.

Another great planting tip is to utilise the blending of hot and cold colours. Hot colours such as yellows, oranges and reds can be planted together while whites, blues and pastels can be used along a planting border or in a group of pots. Staggered heights and different plant forms and textures should also be encouraged.

Is a cottage garden high maintenance?

For many people, the cottage garden represents the ultimate vision of natural beauty, with drifts of blowsy flowers and borders crammed full - all vying for attention. Unfortunately the traditional cottage garden does demand a significant amount of work and upkeep; this includes deadheading, cutting back, staking and other routine jobs to maintain its beauty.

You need to consider how much time and effort you want to put into your garden and adjust your ambition accordingly. It may be wise to start by dedicating a portion of your garden to the cottage garden style, to see how you get on before fully committing. Alternatively, why not consider a hybrid style? This can be done by introducing extra evergreen shrubs to offer some ground cover and reduce the burden of the maintenance needs.

If you think that you need a big garden to have an idyllic cottage garden, that is not the case. It can be created on a small scale or even in containers.

HOW TO CREATE A COTTAGE GARDEN IN 10 EASY STEPS

1. Site Survey: Choose a sunny site where possible, before undertaking a soil analysis to help with plant selection. Soil testing kits are inexpensive and extremely beneficial, helping to ensure that you choose the right plants for your garden type.
2. Design: Sketching out a design on paper, choose the plants you want to use. It always helps to make a few notes on each plant - as you can reference this when planting, and in the future as well - but it is beneficial to carry out a bit of preparation before planting.
3. Clear: Remove any existing weeds or unwanted plants, making sure that you are being thorough with this.
4. Prepare: Fork in organic matter, such as compost or manure. Some slow-release fertiliser can be added too.
5. Mark out: Use a spray line to mark out your design of the flower beds. You can also use a garden hose to mark out the edge of the beds and paths as an alternative.



6. Plant: Get planting! Make sure that each plant is properly firmed in to establish your cottage garden plants - this is crucial for the growing season.
7. Water: Watering is fundamental as your plants put down roots. A few liquid feeds with a fertiliser such as Seaweed extract, diluted and watered on, will help the plants to establish. It is worth noting that watering early in the morning is the best practice, making sure to always water your plants directly and not by simply spraying with a hose from a distance.
8. Mulch: Mulching, or spreading compost around your plants on the soil surface, is highly beneficial with reducing weeding and watering as well as feeding the plants. Stake any taller plants with canes and twine if conditions are windy.
9. Dead head: Remove any dead flowers or leaves with decent secateurs as the season progresses, to promote new growth when the plants are ready. It should be noted that any 'non-woody' plants should not be cut down to the ground in autumn, their bronze stems should be left to be coated in winter frost in order to protect the roots and shield important wildlife.
10. Cut back: Cut back your plants in early spring when the new foliage starts to appear at ground level.



TOP 10 PLANTS FOR COTTAGE GARDENS



1



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Dianthus 'Tequila Sunrise'

No cottage garden should be without Dianthus, or, as they are affectionately known 'Pinks'. Low growing and hummock forming, they are perfect for the front of a cottage border or even at the edge of a container. If you can, try and plant them near a window so that you can appreciate the scent on an early summer's day. The bees will always buzz around these Pinks, so it's not a bad idea to plant them near a Veg patch if you have one.



2



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Lavender Augustifolia 'Munstead'

Loved by gardeners across the land, its mass of purple flower spikes that appear in mid-to-late summer is striking across the backdrop of its grey-green foliage. The flower spikes hover above the leaves, abundant in number. Lavenders prefer not to be planted in cold winds, so planting them in a fully sunny spot in a South, East or Westerly aspect is advised.



3



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Rosa 'Courtyard Climber'

This Gardening Express rambling rose variety is nothing short of plant royalty in the cottage garden. The perfect rose for any cottage garden, this vigorous climber is perfect for growing on an arbour or garden wall. Flowering from later spring into the summer, the semi-double crimson flowers and subtle scent are sure to win over many admirers.



4



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Digitalis x Valinii Foxlight 'Plum Gold' (PBR)

Digitalis x valinii Foxlight 'Plum Fold' (PBR) gives us upright, bright pink flowers with a rich plum and gold speckled throat. Their striking appearance justifies their place in any cottage garden. Offering great value in any garden, this stunning variety continues to produce flowers late into the summer and even into Autumn in warmer areas.



5



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Phlox Subulata 'Emerald Cushion'

This is an amazing carpet-like plant; calling it a living carpet describes its nature perfectly. It hugs the ground tightly and creeps from its growing crowns to conquer its territory. It is when it flowers, though, that it looks incredible. Its tiny flowers cover the area in a bright colour; in this case your Phlox will produce violet-blue flowers that engulf the foliage in late spring to early summer.

TOP 10 PLANTS FOR COTTAGE GARDENS



6



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Hydrangea Macrophylla 'Rodeo Deep Purple'

This is a tough shrub that never lets you down. 'Rodeo Deep Purple' is a favourite of high-end florists who value the enormous mop-heads which cover the plant all summer. Hydrangeas grow best in dappled shade, although they will survive in sunshine and can tolerate a wide range of soils. This particular variety will grow to a height and width of 1.5 metres.



7



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Wisteria 'Blue Moon'

Wisteria is a plant that requires an investment of both time and patience. To many, the Wisteria above a doorframe, on a pergola or growing on the front of a house is the perfect backdrop to a cottage garden. Gracing your garden with cascades of stunning blue-mauve flowers with white centres from May to June, these plants prefer a South or Westerly aspect in sun or partial shade. This deciduous plant gives a beautiful autumnal display at the end of the summer.



8



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Hydrangea 'Runaway Bride'

'Best in Show' at the Chelsea flower show in 2019, this Hydrangea royalty will fit seamlessly into a mixed cottage garden border. This deciduous shrub has a long flowering period, starting in spring and extending through to autumn. Their flowers are lace-cap white, tinging pink with age and contrasted nicely by their dark green leaves. Although happy planted in all aspects of the garden, these plants will need shelter from cold, biting winds. They produce a good autumn colour at the end of summer with their fading flowers.



9



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Clematis Armandii 'Apple Blossom'

This large, vigorous Clematis is a natural addition to the cottage garden. Its fragrant white flowers are beautifully offset by dark green foliage. Producing 5cm wide flowers from early-to-mid spring, it makes a welcome early star of the cottage garden. The evergreen foliage offers vertical coverage all year round, making it a gardener's favourite. Plant your Clematis in a South, East or West facing position to keep the base shaded and cool.



10



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Paeonia 'Callie's Memory' – Paeonia Itoh

A sturdy herbaceous perennial that is often favoured by artists wishing to paint flowers, they are a beautiful addition to the cottage garden. 'Callie's Memory' offers dark green foliage which grows up to 80cm, but it's their stunning semi-double ruffled flowers that win over so many admirers, with their blush apricot colouring. Peonies can grow in a wide range of soils but will not like water-logged conditions. They prefer the sunshine but will take partial, dappled shade.



Photo by Stephen Baker



Photo by Annie Spratt



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