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Stalwarts of Stockton Bury

Tamsin Westhorpe

Fig. 1 Cider orchard, viewed from the café

When you have a four-acre garden to tend, and a 300-plus acre farm, there's no time to grow fussy plants. Stockton Bury Gardens has been created over the last 45 years by my farming uncle Raymond Treasure, and his partner Gordon Fenn. The garden is at the heart of a working farm, and up until 25 years ago it was a passionate hobby. It is now open five days a week in spring and summer, and is blossoming as an open garden with a popular café. It is still very much a family concern as it has been over five generations, so it seems fitting that my sister Connie and I have joined our uncles to ensure their creation continues to thrive – she works as a farmer and manages the café, and I work as a gardener.

The garden is made up of separate, smaller gardens, which offer visitors

the chance to relate the planting to a smaller space. At Stockton Bury we are lucky to have several historic buildings such as the dovecote and tithe barn (figs 2 & 3) – these monuments of the past have been incorporated into the garden, and they provide a real sense of place. The main lawn is home to the largest monkey puzzle tree in Herefordshire (fig. 4), planted by my great-great-grandfather in 1884,



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Fig. 2 Interior of the dovecote



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Fig. 3 The tithe barn houses our café



Fig. 4 Monkey puzzle, *Araucaria araucana*, overlooks the productive garden

and the kitchen garden beyond keeps the family and garden café well stocked with seasonal produce. The brick wall in the kitchen garden provides the more tender plants with protection from winter wet and cold. At the foot of this wall nerines, agapanthus,

roscoea and eucomis thrive (figs 5 & 6), and on the wall kiwis, peaches and cherries ensure there is always a home-grown summer-fruit bowl on the table.

Farmers don't often stray far from their flock, so creating a garden was Raymond's way of having

a break from his work without leaving home. When these two eager plantsmen did leave the premises, it was to visit other gardens owned by their plant enthusiast friends, including Christopher Lloyd; Raymond's second cousin John Treasure (acclaimed clematis grower); Beth Chatto; John Massey; and the queen of snowdrops, Veronica Cross. Over the years they would swap plants with these eminent gardeners, and the collection of hardy plants at Stockton Bury grew and grew. Most of the plants in the garden come with a story and the memory of a friend.

The garden is fairly sheltered, with a heavy clay soil and high rainfall.

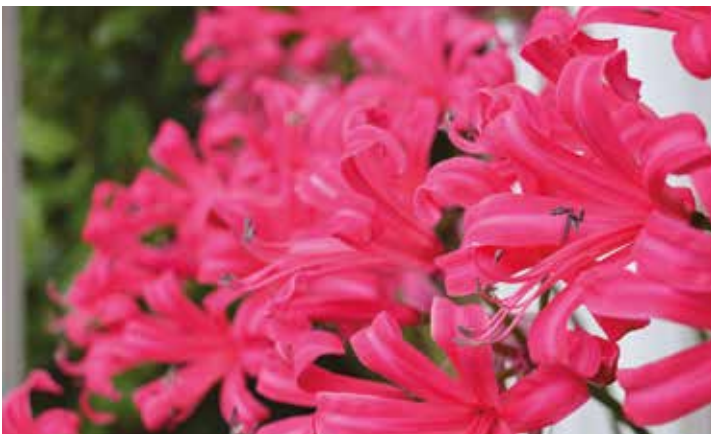


Fig. 5 *Nerine* 'Zeal Giant'

At the far end of the garden is the Dingle (fig. 7), which was created from a former quarry – this is a challenging frost pocket. Winters can be harsh in Herefordshire, so it's a task to keep plants that are tender from year to year without protection.

Although there is a winter-heated polytunnel on site, Raymond and Gordon have steered clear of growing too many tender plants. Not because they don't favour them, more because a busy farming schedule doesn't allow them the time to lift or protect tender plants. After years of growing on the same site, there aren't many plants that they haven't put to the test. I will often present them with a plant and be told "It's not hardy enough!";

the latest being *Verbena officinalis* var. *grandiflora* 'Bampton', which I planted anyway, in a south-facing spot. Sadly, it didn't make it through the winter – so they were right again!

I recently asked Gordon to share with me a list of his most favoured hardy perennials. "Now I'm getting older and prefer gardening in the shade, I have a fondness for woodland plants", was his reply. As a result of old as well as new plantings, the garden offers incredible interest thanks to the many 'get down and crouch' plants (those that are so unusual you are tempted to get down closer to the flower to inspect them, even if that involves getting wet legs). Thanks to his passion for shade-lovers, the garden is home to an army of very



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Fig. 6 *Agapanthus*, *roscoea* and *eucomis* in sheltered position

handsome spring-flowering woodland plants. In late March, the show begins with *Cardamine quinquefolia* (fig. 8) and wood anemones, *A. nemorosa* – most notably the pure white *A. n.* 'Vestal' (fig. 9). April sees the arrival of the erythroniums, podophyllums and the



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Fig. 7 The Dingle

Fig. 8 *Cardamine quinquefolia*

robust and rather lovely *Lamium orvala* (fig. 10). This nettle-like plant is perfect for those who want to attract pollinators into their garden early in the year, and it's a great filler plant in a border. Another plant that we just wouldn't be without in spring is the biennial *Smyrniium perfoliatum* (fig. 11). Some will warn you that it is invasive, but we don't mind – it fills the borders with ribbons of lime-green

Fig. 10 *Lamium orvala*

foliage that we welcome. Plus it pulls up easily if you want to curtail it.

In the Dingle, the fresh spears of foliage from hostas and veratrums are dramatic to watch, and by May they offer a foliage display that's hard to rival. We grow both *Veratrum nigrum* and *V. viride* (fig. 12). For me, the foliage and form of *V. viride* are the more attractive of the two. I can't let May pass by without mentioning the late-flowering *Tulipa*

Fig. 9 *Anemone nemorosa* 'Vestal'

sprengeri (fig. 13). This wonderful little red species tulip seems to like us, and since planting about five bulbs that were given to my uncle by Christopher Lloyd 40 years ago, we now have hundreds. It's quite a spectacle.

May and early June are also a time when I start to count flowers. We have a group of giant Himalayan lilies, *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, in our café garden (fig. 14), and this year we had eleven impressive flower spikes. The giant lily is a talking point if ever there was one: in late spring its large, glossy heart-shaped leaves attract attention, followed by scented, giant white blooms in June and July which are the icing on the cake. This spring, due to very late frosts, we did have to protect the foliage with fleece but, if the bulbs aren't sitting in winter wet, they will make it through the colder months.

Make sure you plant at least three because they look good in a group, and be patient as they can take years to flower – it's worth the wait though. Once flowered, the plant dies, but you will spot baby bulbs forming at the base, so the journey of excitement is far from over.

Although Stockton Bury is praised as a spring garden, June is an explosion of colour. With such good growing conditions many of our hardy perennials romp away, and border-editing is a constant task. Robust plants such as *Lysimachia clethroides* (fig. 15), with its white swan-like flower spikes, need controlling. Mind you, if you want to pull in the butterflies, there is no better plant to do this. Another plant that you need to keep an eye

on, but which adds a puff of romantic blue to our July borders, is *Campanula lactiflora* (figs 16 & 17). Thanks to our good soil it can reach way beyond the suggested height, and often towers over my head. We do allow this plant to self-seed, but we take care to remove it if it travels too close to the front of the border, for fear that it will crowd out other plants such as the common spotted orchid, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, that frequently pops up here. After the campanula flowers have faded, we are quick to deadhead, or even cut the plants right down to the ground in the hope of a second flush.

Another plant that suits our country setting and is also welcome to roam free, is the cow parsley, *Anthriscus sylvestris*



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Fig. 11 *Smyrnium perfoliatum*

'Ravenswing' (fig. 18). If you haven't grown it before, it is basically cow parsley with a deep maroon stem. Its fine heads of flowers float romantically over a border, and I defy anyone to find a plant more fitting for a countryside plot.



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Fig. 12 *Veratrum viride* foliage



Fig. 13 *T. sprengeri*

We don't tend to grow many new plants, as my uncles have more of an interest in heritage and unusual specimens. However, occasionally

something will change that. One plant that has been added to our summer repertoire is *Alstroemeria* Indian Summer (fig. 19). It has dark maroon foliage

and yellow, gold and orange flowers that go on and on. It is no exaggeration when I say that the blooms continue from June until the first frost. It grows well



Fig. 14 *Cardiocrinum giganteum*

in a border or a pot, and seems to be a tough plant. It's a keeper.

August is all about fruit for us. Plums, damsons, blackcurrants and gooseberries need picking, and my mother gets her jam pan out. Next to the fruit frame, eucomis add a tropical feel, in pots and in our south-facing borders. If planted in a hot spot, we seem to be able to get them through the winter unprotected, but it's not the same story for dahlias. I am trying to sneak the odd dahlia back into Stockton Bury, but my uncle isn't convinced that we have the time to pander to their needs. This year you might spot dahlias *D.* 'Karma Choc' and *D.* 'David Howard' lurking in the back



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Fig. 15 *Lysimachia clethroides*

of the border – let's hope the uncles don't notice!

Having an eager niece keen to try everything for herself, I suspect they will find that the portfolio of



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Fig. 16 *Campanula lactiflora* viewed through the hop arch

plants at Stockton Bury will continue to change. Plants will fail, others will try to take over – but isn't that all part of the fun of gardening, and the way we learn? 🌱



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Fig. 17 *C. lactiflora* flowers



Fig. 18 *A. s.* 'Ravenswing' with buttercups and aquilegia



Fig. 19 *Alstroemeria* Indian Summer

Garden writer and gardener **Tamsin Westhorpe** shares the hardy plants that year after year bring magic to her uncles' open garden in Herefordshire.

Stockton Bury Gardens

To find out more about the garden, visit www.stocktonbury.co.uk. Located two miles north of the market town of Leominster, it is open from April through to the end of September, Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 4.30pm.

Follow @tamsinwesthorpe on Instagram to see what's in flower at Stockton Bury.

Diary of a Modern Country Gardener

Tamsin has written a book about her life as a gardener at Stockton Bury: it was published in 2020. Anna Pavord wrote in *The Times*, 'Garden Diarists are more likely to Instagram than write books, so Tamsin Westhorpe's *Diary of a Modern Country Gardener* was a welcome arrival this year. It's a self-deprecating and practical account by the former editor of *The English Garden* magazine of a year at Stockton Bury.' Signed copies are available from www.orphanspublishing.co.uk, or unsigned ones from most book shops.