



1. Early summer border
In early summer this double border is a frothy mass of lime-green *Alchemilla mollis*, *Salvia hians* and *Geranium phaeum* 'Walküre' with spires of white lupins and foxgloves. Once the alchemilla has finished flowering it will be cut back hard to make room for later-flowering asters.



2. A room of its own
In gardens large enough to have a separate area for herbaceous planting, you can simply close the door when the season is over. This view through a doorway looks down the centre of a traditional double border designed to look its best in June.

3. Light and airy
A closer view of the same border (2) is a study in cool shades, with an under-planting of *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' and *Geranium pratense* 'Mrs Kendall Clark' that appear to float among the green. Beyond are roses trained on domes and the pencil shapes of Irish yew.



4. Country garden style
This big, billowing herbaceous border is designed for effect in June and July, after which other areas take over. It includes some roses for structure and a few late asters, but once it peaks, it is left to retire gradually and gracefully, with no deadheading.

BRITT WILCOX/RTD/REX 2 & 3; JASON NICHOLAS/4; WILLIAM COLLIERSON



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Herbaceous borders

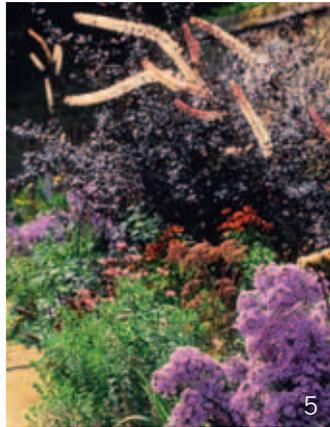
The art of making beautiful borders is to think of yourself as painting with plants, using big, broad brush strokes

WORDS ARNE MAYNARD

DESIGN IDEAS

5. Rich mix

A richly coloured late summer border where the main impact comes from the dark leaves of *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple', which acts as a backdrop to the arching ivory spikes of *Actaea simplex* *Atropurpurea* Group.



6. Staying upright

In a group of vertical forms, *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Dear Anja' weaves itself among white *Campanula latifolia* var. *macrantha* 'Alba', the seed heads of alliums and the pale blue-mauve flowers of *Geranium pratense* 'Mrs Kendall Clark'.



7. Passing through

A pink oriental poppy glows briefly and beautifully in a border composed of longer-flowering pale pinks and whites, *Hesperis matronalis* var. *albiflora*, *Campanula lactiflora* 'Loddon Anna', *Astrantia* 'Roma' and catmint.



8. Border stalwarts

Astrantias are incredibly useful in the herbaceous border, covering the ground without being invasive, combining well with other plants and self-seeding reliably. Cut back after the first flowering for a second flush. This is *Astrantia* 'Roma'.

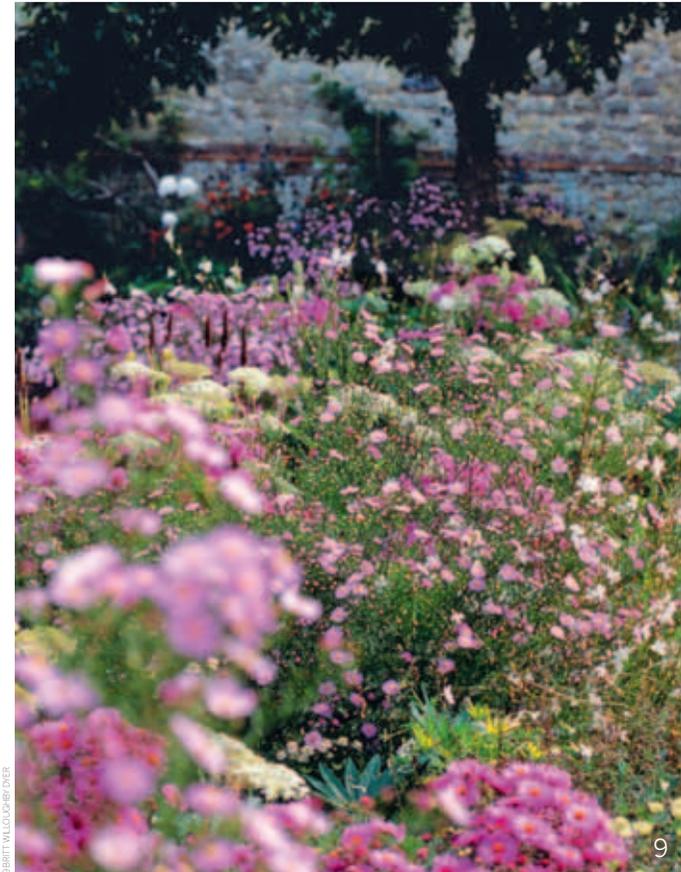


Historically, the herbaceous border belongs to a past era, having had its heyday in the country house gardens of the Edwardian period. It was designed to perform in June and July, the months when house owners and guests decamped to the country, and after this it could be cut back and tidied up.

Nowadays, the herbaceous border may need to make use of some structural planting from roses or topiary to earn a place in the garden and look attractive for longer. By working in early tulips with aquilegias and geraniums for spring and asters for late

summer, the main flowering season can be successfully extended in both directions.

When I'm designing a herbaceous border, I start by defining what sort of atmosphere or mood I want it to have, whether the main effect is to be rich and warm, cool and airy, or fresh and sharp. I don't draw up a planting plan because I find this too rigid. Instead I make a list of the plants that will 'paint' the mood. I am after a border that has a flowing, organic feel, so I choose a limited palette of plants and use them in irregular groups and drifts. I might use a dominant plant like cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*) or globe thistle (*Echinops* species) as the



9. Late summer border

The border (seen earlier in the year in picture 1) enters a new colour phase in late summer with a haze of pink gauras and asters. Such intensively planted borders require high maintenance, and plants should be lifted and divided every three years to keep them performing well.

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main player, with the looser shapes of spikes, discs (daisy-type plants), buttons (such as *Sanguisorba officinalis*) and umbellifers. I also like to mix heights, rather than arranging them in the traditional way with tall plants at the back, small at the front.

I want the colours to be diffused, as they are in a Turner painting, so when I'm setting the plants out, I weave them in and out of each other, using a single point of colour that connects with a group further along the border to keep a sense of fluidity. I might use the dark foliage of *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple' or *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy', to increase the sense of depth

and volume. Both are woody plants that can be coppiced to keep their size in check.

At the end, I add what I call fillers, many of which are self-seeders: opium poppies (*Papaver somniferum*), red orach (*Atriplex hortensis* var. *rubra*), foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*), sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) and horned violet (*Viola cornuta*). These can be put in as plug plants, and what they give is that lovely soft, ethereal feel – a sense of establishment – as well as the habit of re-designing the border by randomly migrating to other parts of it over subsequent years. □ NEXT MONTH Topiary