

A photograph of a garden scene featuring a stream with a small waterfall. The background is filled with dense foliage, including trees with green and yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. The stream flows from the top right towards the bottom left, with a small stone structure acting as a dam or waterfall. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

Lessons from LLANOVER

Ablaze with the fiery hues of autumn, this landscaped garden is a living testament to successive generations of visionary gardeners – and there is plenty of inspiration for small plots, too

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THE DETAILS

STYLE

Landscaped garden

SEASONS OF INTEREST

Year round, with autumn as a high point

SIZE

The Round Garden is quarter of an acre

SOIL

Till – a mix of clay, sand and gravel of varying pH



As the low autumn sun burnishes the trees and shrubs in Elizabeth Murray's garden at Llanover House in Monmouthshire, the golden days of autumn reach a point of perfection when the spectacular tapestry of colour and texture is subtly echoed in the surrounding landscape and the distant views. In the Round Garden, close to the house, the 16th-century dovecote is clothed with Virginia creeper, and deep borders overflow with ornamental grasses and richly hued shrubs and perennials.

Llanover has been in Elizabeth's family since the 18th century, with each successive generation leaving a legacy of landscaping and planting. The Round Garden is where Elizabeth has chosen to make her own mark. Its circular lawn is bounded on one side by a high brick wall and the dovecote, and on the other by a large curving pond that is fed by the stream that winds its way through the wider garden. The borders, when Elizabeth inherited them, were purely herbaceous and urgently needed to be reinvigorated. This was a substantial task, so she enlisted the help of garden designer Mary Payne. The brief asked for maximum impact and minimum effort – a not unreasonable request when gardening on a large scale. "Mary was fantastic," Elizabeth says. "From July and well into the autumn, this garden just gets better and better."

Grasses, including *Stipa gigantea*, *Pennisetum* 'Cassian's Choice' and *Cortaderia richardii*, have been incorporated into the borders for late reliable interest, while among the perennials, *Amsonia tabernaemontana* is a favourite for its wonderful autumn colour when the foliage turns to pure gold. Bright blue *Aster frikartii* 'Monch' repeats through the borders, and Elizabeth is particularly fond of another blue aster, 'Twilight', which she describes as "not too big and it combines beautifully with the grasses and has a lovely seed head". Salvias provide bright splashes of colour late into autumn, with 'Amistad' 'Cerro Potosi' and *uliginosa* generally proving to be pretty hardy in the gardens at Llanover. Dahlias 'David Howard', *coccinea* and 'Trelissick Purple' are the same, although Elizabeth does take cuttings of the salvias and lifts some of the dahlias as insurance against a particularly cold winter.

"It is difficult to create a sense of intimacy in a garden of this size with borders of such depth," Elizabeth says. "But when groups come round, I show them the plant combinations and explain how they could be translated into a smaller garden." She needs to fill as much space as possible, but there are more compact varieties of grasses and perennials that will produce a similar effect on a smaller scale. The same is true of trees and shrubs. A multi-stemmed



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP *Cortaderia richardii* and *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' bring beauty to the borders; *Acer griseum*, aconites and leucanthemum fringe the path THIS PAGE, FROM TOP The dovecote in the Walled Garden; Elizabeth Murray; a glimpse of the house through an arched doorway

Amelanchier will bring intense autumn colour to the garden, *Cotinus* 'Grace' can be cut back each spring to keep it compact and – provided they are planted in a sheltered spot – Japanese acers have some of the finest red foliage. The key with smaller gardens is to choose plants that look good in more than one season so that you get maximum value from them.

While Llanover owns the 'borrowed' views that it looks out on, there is potential for our own boundaries and beyond to add interest to our gardens. A tree planted against a fence takes up half the space of one growing in the open, cutting a dip or opening a peephole in a hedge can frame a fine tree or shrub in a neighbour's garden, while echoing the trees or shrubs in an adjoining plot can blur the boundaries and make the garden seem larger.

It was Elizabeth's father, Robin Herbert, a former president of the Royal Horticultural Society, who introduced many of the most colourful trees and shrubs at Llanover. He spent much of his early life on the east coast of America, where he greatly admired the spectacular autumn colours. On his return home, he began to introduce the trees he had grown to love, including the acers, nyssas, hickories, ►





liquidambers and euonymus, which now add their vibrant colours to the garden.

When Elizabeth, together with her husband Ross, took on responsibility for the estate, her father handed everything over to her. "It's yours to manage as you wish now," he said. "Before he left, I asked him to walk round the garden with me and tell me the names of everything," Elizabeth says. "It was a point of pride for him that nothing was labelled and he could just reel off the names, but I didn't have that depth of knowledge. Since then, the most visible change has come from Ross, who is also known as the chainsaw gardener! He will tell me when a group of trees has become overcrowded, or where a peephole needs to be opened because there's meant to be a view. I'm too attached to my childhood memories and find it very difficult to cut things down. Ross seeing the big picture has been a great help.

"I was so lucky to inherit a garden with the fantastic structure created by my ancestor in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the tree planting that has carried on through the generations," Elizabeth continues. "It's a tradition we carry on with. We planted three Cedars of Lebanon for my father's 60th birthday and magnolias for each of our daughters on their 21st birthdays. People ask us why we are still planting trees and I tell them that if they are well-planted and happy, they can most definitely be enjoyed within one's own lifetime." And, as Llanover so magnificently proves, well into the future, too.

FOR MORE INFORMATION see llanovergarden.co.uk. It usually opens in aid of the NGS and by appointment – please check the website before planning a visit.

6 RELIABLE LATE-INTEREST *perennials*

1 DAHLIA MERCKII Single lilac-pink flowers into September; hardy in a sheltered spot in full sun; height to 90cm.

2 RUDBECKIA FULGIDA 'GOLDSTURM' Golden-yellow flowers with central black cones from August to October; combines well with grasses; 75cm.

3 ASTER FRIKARTII 'MONCH' Showy lavender-blue flowers on sturdy well-branching stems from midsummer to mid-autumn; disease resistant; 70cm.

4 SALVIA 'AMISTAD' Deep purple-blue flowers from July to October; deadhead for repeat flowering; hardy in most gardens; 1.2m.

5 DAHLIA 'DAVID HOWARD' Soft bronze-orange flowers on dark bronze-tinged foliage from July until October; hardy in mild regions; 1m.

6 CALAMAGROSTIS BRACHYTRICHA An upright ornamental grass that blends beautifully with flowering perennials; foliage turns yellow in autumn with purple-tinged flowering plumes; 1-1.5m.

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THIS PAGE From high up in the house, the Round Garden and beyond make an impressive outlook