

# Autumn glory at Llanover

A border in this private South Wales garden, amid features dating from the 16th and late 18th centuries, is a paragon of glorious colour in October and November »

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## Dovecote with autumnal planting

*Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia creeper) glows with fiery shades on the 16th-century dovecote in the Round Garden at Llanover House, Monmouthshire. It is surrounded by a magnificent border created by Mary Payne and, latterly, Peter Hall. In front, grass *Calamagrostis brachytricha* and a *Dahlia* 'David Howard' grow next to *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch'. Clumps of *Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm' are placed near the front of the border; it is one of few autumn daisies short enough to be sited so.





**Long-lasting floral displays**

In the border, Peter Hall's preferred 'hot' colours add to Mary Payne's original plantings, such as orange-red *Dahlia coccinea* seedling against grass *Miscanthus sinensis* 'China' and a statuesque *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Apollo'. In front, *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm' shines alongside grass *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola', which has provided a long season of pale yellow coloration.



**Artful colour combinations**

In another part of the Round Garden, white *Anaphalis triplinervis* 'Sommerschnee' in front highlights the depth of the magenta-pink flowers of *Salvia microphylla* 'Cerro Potosi'. To the rear is a bold mass of *Miscanthus sinensis* 'China'; on the left, grass *Calamagrostis brachytricha* is silhouetted against a *Magnolia delavayi*.



**Sunlit accents of purple, yellow and blue**

Blue-flowered *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch' is central in this area of the border. Silvery *Anaphalis triplinervis* 'Sommerschnee' in front highlights the scarlet flowers of *Hesperantha coccinea*. The purple foliage behind is vine relative *Vitis coignetiae* Claret Cloak ('Frovit'), a colour repeated by the foliage of *Ligularia* 'Britt Marie Crawford' further forward. The purples and bronze tones add depth to the planting. >>



Late summer and autumn sunlight can have a wonderful clarity, illuminating the last flowering perennials of the year. Add some early-autumn foliage colour and the impact makes for a truly vibrant finale to the gardening year.

Herbaceous borders, dominated by perennials, have long been the mainstay of the late-season garden. They were often labour-intensive affairs, and much effort over the last few decades has gone into rethinking them. Continental European planting has tended to emphasise the role of ornamental grasses and seedheads and their ability to keep interest going until well into winter. Gardening 'exoticists' have focused on the way that dramatic foliage and bright, warm-climate flowers are now at their best. The border alongside the Round Garden at Llanover House illustrates a good compromise – an example of a mixed border style that looks lively and colourful until the first frosts, but maintains interest after that.

There has been a garden at Llanover House since the late 18th century, when Benjamin Waddington bought a farmhouse, extended and improved it, and created a landscape in the informal style made popular by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Some of the many magnificent trees that grace the grounds date from this time, notably eight London planes (*Platanus x acerifolia*). These provide a superb backdrop for a more modern arboretum, started in the 1960s by Robin Herbert VMH, President of the RHS 1984–1994. A collection of magnolias makes a spring visit particularly rewarding.

#### Borders with maximum effect

Elizabeth Murray (Robin Herbert's daughter) moved to Llanover with her husband Ross in 1999. She brought in well-known horticultural consultant Mary Payne to replant the borders in an area known as the Round Garden, where a gracefully curving brick wall partially encloses a west-facing area – a pond forms its other boundary. It incorporates a small bridge over a stream, and a dovecote, which was, says Elizabeth, 'an ornamental garden of its time where the ladies of the house and visitors would have strolled... the dovecote was older but skilfully incorporated as a focal point'.

The wall of the Round Garden encloses a perfect setting for a border as there is good afternoon sun. The ground was covered in

black plastic for two years, to kill off all weeds. Elizabeth asked Mary to create a planting scheme to the brief 'maximum effect for minimum effort', 'and,' says Elizabeth, 'since Peter Hall joined us as Head Gardener in 2013 bringing experience and new ideas, he has made additions, making it hotter.' This refers to the reds and oranges he has introduced, in his words, 'using more half-hardy plants such as cannas, dahlias, salvias and deep purple foliage, such as that of *Ricinus communis*'.

'Hot' borders are at their best late in the season – most red and orange flowers come from warm climates and need several months of British summer to reach flowering point. The South American species of *Salvia* provide reliable, vibrant, late-season shades in the garden at this time of year. Most will survive winter without protection in sheltered gardens, but here some of the salvias are lifted each year, along with the dahlias, 'partly for frost protection,' Peter says, 'but also to allow us to put them in different places every year.'

#### Daisies among the grass

The mainstay of the border here, however, is the selection of long-lived perennials that Mary Payne originally chose. These are nearly all predictably behaving clump-formers with a good post-flowering appearance. Purple and blue tones are provided by *Veronicastrum virginicum* and *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, both early- to midsummer-flowering perennials with neat upright foliage that becomes part of the background for the later performers. Lavender-blue-flowered *Aster x frikartii* 'Mönch', just one of several members of the daisy family in this colourful part of the garden, begins flowering in mid- to late summer. Sunflower *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen' is a later-flowering example from the family; both can be in flower for several months. Grasses are invaluable for what is undoubtedly the dreariest part of the garden year – November and December, but in the eyes of many are of little visual interest before this time. There are grasses in the border here, but in a proportion where they can make their seasonal contribution but are not too prominent earlier.

The end of the year can be a wonderfully colourful time, and Llanover's border shows how this can be achieved, without sacrificing interest for early summer or indeed winter. ◉

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#### Reflections in the water

Looking across the pond and Round Garden to the dovecote and a magnificent 200-year-old London plane, *Stipa gigantea* seedheads capture the low autumnal light, side-lit against a darker background. A large, and probably old, royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*) grows at the edge of the pond at the left.



#### Streamside tranquillity

An unusual view, almost certainly dating back to the time of Benjamin Waddington in the 18th century. On the far side is the grass *Stipa gigantea*; planted at regular intervals, this graceful plant helps define the outer perimeter of the Round Garden, its flower and seedheads present from June to December.

## Llanover Garden

**Address:** Llanover House, Llanover, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire NP7 9EF; 07753 423635; llanovergarden.co.uk

**Size:** 6 ha (15 acres)

**Soil:** glacial till, acidic in places.

**Age:** an 18th-century landscape with new planting from 1960s onwards.

**Key season:** all-year interest. Magnolia collection makes a spring visit rewarding.

**Summary:** country house garden with perennial planting and arboretum, much planted over 40 years by former RHS President Robert Herbert VMH.

**Open:** open several times a year for charity, talks and events, see website.

