



GLORIOUS GARDENS
KENT

National treasure

This quarter-acre garden may be small, but it is home to a diverse range of different areas and a National Plant Collection. Great plants, good design and a long season of interest - 1 Brickwall Cottages has it all ►

PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS WORDS ANNIE GATTI

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GLORIOUS GARDENS

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A dense mixed hedge hides Sue Martin's plant-filled, almost quarter-acre garden as you approach her terraced cottage, in the village of Frittenden in Kent. When she moved in 23 years ago, however, the hedge was only knee-high. Passersby could see right across the then L-shaped plot, which, with its central fruit cage, beds full of well-tended vegetables and grassy paths, looked much like an allotment. 'Apart from one 'Beauty of Bath' apple tree, there was nothing of any size,' explains Sue, a retired cello teacher. 'It was like being in a goldfish bowl.'

The first thing she did, while waiting for the hedge to grow up and thicken out, was to plant a selection of trees including *Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia', *Liquidambar styraciflua*, *Cercis canadensis*, *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*, *Sorbus aria* and *malus*, that would both give structure to the garden and provide screening from neighbouring houses. The veg and fruit beds were grassed over and she made a central path edged with lavender to provide a view down the garden from her kitchen window. Then she began to plan how to fill the southwest-facing garden

with the plants that really interested her: hardy perennials. Happily, the yellow Wealden clay soil had been regularly manured and limed by the previous owners, so when she returned home from the first of her regular Kent Hardy Plant Society meetings with a cache of specimens she 'just couldn't resist', there was good friable soil to plant them into. And so, the process of carving out a series of borders that would provide a flowery journey through this small two-part garden began.

Having read *Beth Chatto's Garden Notebook*, she decided to make a yellow bed, the first of her two colour-themed borders (the second, a silver and red planting at the end of the central path, was a recent addition) and marked out its relaxed shape with a hose. A yellow species geum that she spotted at Elizabeth Strangman's Washfield Nursery was added to this border, but the clay soil didn't suit it. Undeterred, Sue tried another, this time the bright orange 'Prinses Juliana'. 'I had thought I didn't like orange in the garden,' she explains 'but it was such a fantastic plant, flowering for months on end, that it started off my collection. Then I saw another geum at a plant sale and bought it, and so it went on.' Now Sue

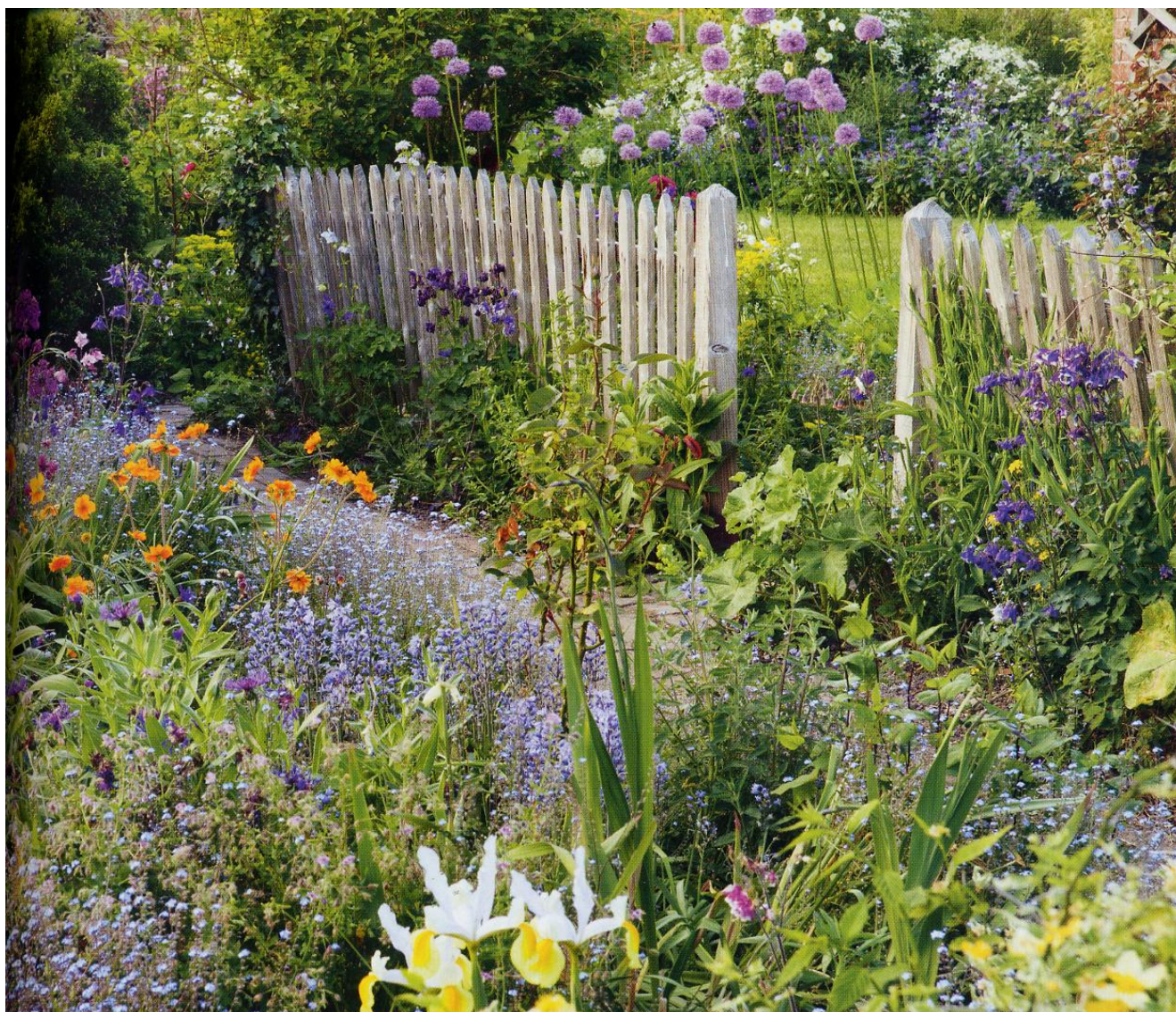
Sue holds a National Collection of Geums, which means that she has colour and foliage from March to December and 'the lawn gets smaller every year'



holds a National Collection of Geums, which means that she has colour and foliage (geums are evergreen) from her 100 or so different kinds from March (when low-growing rival types appear) to December (when taller chiloense cultivars such as 'Prinses Juliana' are sometimes still in bloom), and, she says with a laugh, 'the lawn gets smaller every year'.

Nowadays, visitors to Brickwall Cottages during Sue's early summer National Gardens Scheme (NGS)





PREVIOUS PAGE, OVERLEAF The view across the bottom of Sue Martin's garden in Kent offers glimpses of varieties from her National Collection of Geums, including 'Prinses Juliana', 'Hilltop Beacon', 'Rubin', 'Dolly North', 'Fire Opal' and 'Lady Stratheden'. **OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT** A table and chairs on the path to the greenhouse; a decorative Arabian-style urn in among self-sown aquilegias and irises. **THIS PAGE, ABOVE** Alliums, aquilegias and forget-me-nots by the gateway to Sue's neighbour's house. **BELOW LEFT** *Geum* 'Fire Opal'. **BELOW RIGHT** *Geum* 'Karlskaer'.

open days can travel down the garden along a straight brick path - a replacement for her original lavender-edged grass path - and under a handsome arbour made of chestnut poles, past a square pool and on to the silver and red border in front of an elegant boundary of pleached limes. Alternatively, they can walk across the grass that winds between the densely planted, informally shaped borders to a chestnut arch, where the zingy pink of an original *Rosa* 'American Pillar' is softened by Sue's addition of *R. 'Félicité Perpétue'*. This leads into the second part of the garden, where Sue was able to gain another strip of land when her mother moved into the cottage next door in 1991. This extra section turned the garden into an E-shape.

An early feature in this second area was an informal pond, fenced off when the first grandchildren arrived, which was eventually filled up with plants. Sue left ▶





ABOVE The view back to the house across a square pool with fountain through the home-made chestnut pergolas. To the left are the pink blooms of *Rosa* 'Saint Swithun'. BELOW LEFT *Geum* 'Mandarin'. BELOW CENTRE *Geum* 'Bell Bank'. BELOW RIGHT Dutch iris 'Apollo'. OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT Different foliage colours help make an impact, such as the silvery grey of *Elaeagnus* 'Quicksilver', which Sue says also smells wonderful, seen through the pergola. BOTTOM RIGHT The stone birdbath was Sue's grandmother's, and although it has never held water, it is of great sentimental value.



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the pond liner in and converted it to a boggy area where, after experimenting with tall grasses and other Oudolf-type perennials, she now grows lower-growing species such as liriopie and hardy diascia, which allow glimpses through to the rest of the garden. There are geums too, which make an appearance in almost every bed (a National Collection holder not only has to grow 75% of the varieties listed in the *RHS Plant Finder* but also has to have three plants of each one). Beyond this is a box- and teucium-edged parterre that is divided by gravel paths into four triangular beds, which creates a swirling wheel of flowers and foliage in front of the greenhouse that is the engine room of the garden.

Here, single-handedly, Sue manages the compost heaps, propagation bench and the plants growing on in the polytunnel, which are bound for the nursery Sue set up in 2000 when she retired. Ornamentals steal the show here too, in two square borders filled with roses, another of her passions (she is a volunteer rose deadheader at Sissinghurst), and a selection of summer and autumn perennials including kniphofias, crocosmias and heleniums. From an arbour bench,

become nursery beds, one for chiloense cultivars and the other for rivali types.

She mulches the beds in rotation - she does not have time to do each one every year - and is scrupulous with her regime for dividing the geums, which involves a big session in autumn and then a second wave in spring, before they start flowering. 'Many people don't realise that you have to keep dividing them, otherwise they become woody and deteriorate. I do the chiloense cultivars every three years.'

It is a lot of hard work, but then, the idea of a garden being finished is anathema to Sue. 'I would hate to wake up in the morning and think it's all done,' she says.

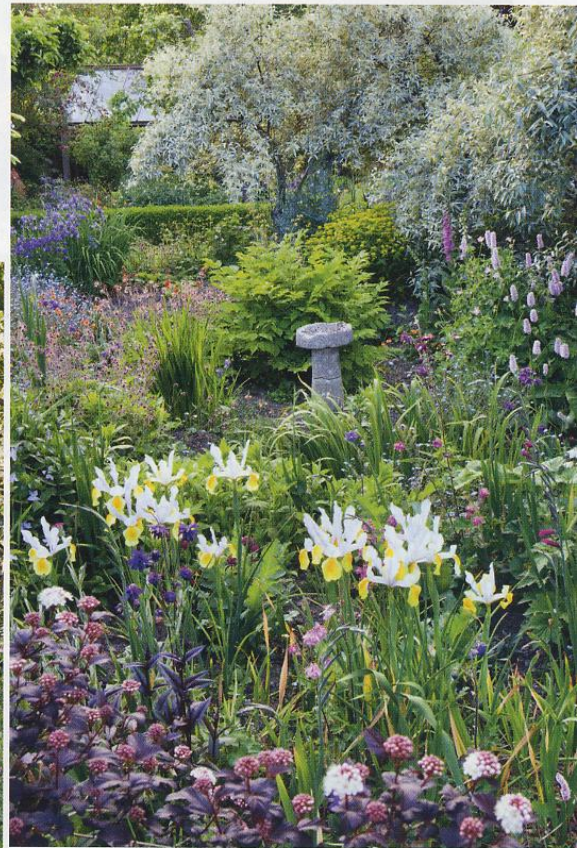
1 Brickwall Cottages, Frittenden, Cranbrook TN17 2DH. The garden is open for the National Gardens Scheme every Sunday and Monday from 29 April to 28 May, 11am-5pm. Also open by appointment - call to arrange. Tel: +44 (0)1580 852425. www.geumcollection.co.uk

For another National Collection, turn to pg 105.

Top tips from 1 Brickwall Cottages ►

A National Collection holder not only has to grow 75% of the varieties listed in the *RHS Plant Finder*, but also has to have three plants of each one

there's a view across these borders to Sue's most recent addition to the garden: four rectangular raised beds filled with the soil from excavating the square pool. Sue originally intended them for vegetables and herbs, but since she continues to add geums to her collection regularly - the recently selected yellow and orange double 'Dawn' is an excellent plant for the front of the border, she says - two of them have now



1 Brickwall Cottages notebook



THROUGH VIEW

The large pergolas, made to Sue's own design from local chestnut poles (*above*), make striking features that can be seen from the kitchen. Sue wanted to be able to see through them, so chose non-vigorous varieties of rose and clematis as climbers.



COLOUR SHOT

Forget-me-nots (myosotis) make a delightful fresh blue foil for many of the taller geums, such as the rich orange double 'Prinses Juliana' (*left*). Later in the summer, Love-in-a-mist creates the same effect.

ALSO IN THE AREA...

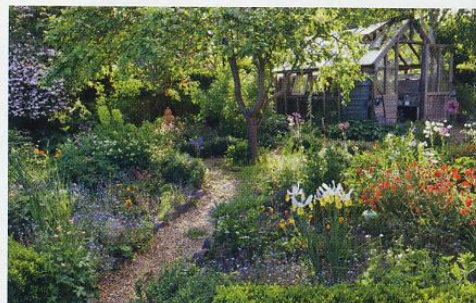
Sue recommends these local hotspots for when you visit her garden:

- **GARDEN** **Hole Park** is noted for its bluebell wood in May. Rolvenden, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 4JB. Tel: +44 (0)1580 241344. www.holepark.com
- **NURSERY** **Madrona Nursery** A family nursery with a range of unusual shrubs and perennials. Pluckley Road, Bethersden TN26 3DD. Tel: +44 (0)1233 820100. www.madrona.co.uk
- **PLACE TO STAY** **Sissinghurst Castle Farmhouse** A 5-star B&B in the grounds of nearby Sissinghurst, the legendary garden. Nr Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2AB. Tel: +44 (0)1580 720992. www.sissinghurstcastlefarmhouse.com

YOUR
NEAREST
GARDEN
CENTRE

Tunbridge Wells Garden Centre, Eridge Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8HR. Restaurant onsite. Home delivery available. Expert staff. Dog Friendly.

Tunbridge Wells
Garden Centre



PLUM JOB

A plum tree makes a focal point at the centre of the parterre (*above*) where the mixed planting is contained on the outside by low box hedging and along the gravel paths by half-moon-shaped stone coping, which Sue sourced at an architectural salvage centre.

GARDEN CHALLENGES

SMALL: This garden covers just under a quarter of an acre. By separating it into diverse areas and giving several routes to discover the space, Sue has made it appear much larger.

CLAY: Sue's soil is Wealden clay - she adds grit to make it more friable and improve the drainage.

SUE'S TIPS ON HOLDING A NATIONAL COLLECTION

- **Plant Heritage**, the National Council for the Conservation of Plants & Gardens (NCCPG) certifies the scheme - go to www.nccpg.com to find out what genera are already covered and those that are not, as well as resources like the handbook and an application pack, or tel: +44 (0)1483 447540.
- **Research your plant group very well before you commit.** Geums like my soil, but they like water too, and we don't get much rain here now.
- **A National Collection will comprise three plants** of each variety, and they must be planted in the ground, not in pots.
- **You have to be very passionate** and willing to give up quite a lot of time.

