

Glorious COLOUR

With lush, colourful planting, Great Dixter is a great place to find ideas

Perched on the Sussex Weald, Great Dixter is the kind of garden to which the plant-obsessed among us make pilgrimages. Made up of six acres of gardens, woodland and meadows, surrounding a medieval timbered house, it was home to horticulturalist and writer Christopher Lloyd.

Born there in 1921, Lloyd put Great Dixter on the gardening map, with playful and radical ideas, such as replacing his mother's rose garden with exotic bananas and cannas. 'Gardeners who always play safe are missing out on the thrill of taking risks,' he explained.

Under his painterly eye, Great Dixter became world-famous for bold, lush planting schemes, enclosed by stately clipped yews and narrow stone pathways to allow you up close to the plants. Unlike many English country gardens, Dixter is unstuffy and fun – there's even a mosaic portrait of Lloyd's beloved dachsunds, Canna and Dahlia, in the Wall Garden.

With a naturalistic planting style – clouds of cow parsley spring up as if blown in from the surrounding countryside – the garden is a maze-like succession of rooms in which to happily lose yourself. There are natural and formal ponds, theatrical and atmospheric topiary, an exotic garden, kitchen garden and meadows full of wildflowers and rare orchids. A maximalist's dream, the dense borders are meticulously planned to ensure there's something interesting to see in every season.

After Lloyd's death in 2006, Great Dixter became a charitable trust, guided by the expertise of head gardener Fergus Garrett. While the garden is always changing, the Trust continues to 'safeguard its spirit', says Garrett. It remains an exciting, experimental canvas crammed with dazzling juxtapositions of colour, shape and texture that shouldn't work together, but really do! >>



BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL

Tulips, in signature Great Dixter brights, contrast with a carnival of lollipop alliums, elegant spires of foxgloves and splashes of *Gladioli byzantinus*.

NATURAL BEAUTY

The biodiverse meadows are studded with drifts of daffodils and snakeshead fritillaries in spring (below), followed by buttercups, camassias and thousands of orchids in summer.





POTS APLENTY

The spring garden is dominated by bulbs, including massed pot displays around the porch.

GET THE LOOK

For Great Dixter style, it's a case of more is more. Go for bold colours and a wild, unruly feel that can be tempered with calming evergreens – yew, box or the scented, spring-flowering osmanthus (*Osmanthus delavayi*).



GIANT FENNEL

This hardy perennial (*Ferula communis*) has mounds of feathery leaves in spring, from which emerges a broomstick-thick stalk up to 3m high. By midsummer, the flower heads will look stunning against a blue sky. It needs full sun and well-drained soil. Water regularly and protect over winter with a dry mulch. Available from greatdixter.co.uk



TULIP 'MERLOT'

A luxurious, lily-type tulip that looks divine with purple alliums, blue aubretia and lime euphorbias. Growing to 50cm tall, it needs shelter from strong winds, and plenty of sun for the best flowers, which appear late April to mid-May. Plant bulbs late October to November, around 15cm deep, in groups of 10-15. Available (late summer) from crocus.co.uk



ANTIRRHINUM DAZZLING LIPS COLLECTION

These bedding snapdragons sizzle from late spring through summer, and go perfectly with vibrant tulips, Dixter-style. Sow seeds in early spring or buy as plugs to be planted out after the last frosts. Go for yellow, red or 'sunset', all 30cm high, and grow in sun and well-drained soil. Available from hayloft.co.uk



BETH'S POPPY

A pink poppy (*Papaver dubium* ssp *lecoqii* var *albiflorum*) that fills the gap between spring bulbs and summer blooms. At 50cm tall, it floats through the borders at Great Dixter (gardener Beth Chatto gave Lloyd the seeds). Sow seeds in spring or autumn onto damp compost, covered with a fine layer of grit. Available from greatdixter.co.uk



***ALLIUM HOLLANDICUM* 'PURPLE SENSATION'**

With perfect spheres of rich-violet flowers carried aloft on metre-high stems from May to June, this perennial bulb is an architectural star. Plant bulbs in autumn, 15cm deep and 15cm apart, in large containers or beds, in sun or partial shade. Available from sarahraven.com



SNAKESHEAD FRITILLARIES 'PLUM & WHITE MIXED'

A native bulb (*Fritillaria meleagris*) with patterned bells in purple or creamy white, these flower in April and May. They reach 30cm high, so plant at the front of a border, naturalised in grass or in pots in a north-facing corner. Plant bulbs in autumn, 15-20cm deep, in humus-rich soil. Available from sarahraven.com

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