

PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

# GARDEN ILLUSTRATED

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## IN BRIEF

**What** Small, walled garden redesigned as a woodland-style garden on different levels.  
**Where** Southwest London.  
**Size** 221 square metres.  
**Soil** Imported mixed loam.  
**Climate** Temperate, with cool to warm summers and mild winters.  
**Hardiness zone** USDA 8.

# Pools of green

*A cool colour palette and dense, textured planting create a woodland feel in this immersive London garden designed by Chris Moss*

WORDS ANNIE GATTI PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM



**This image** Looking across the garden from the sunken bed, the sea of green is punctuated by the tree sculpture, *Arbre Carré* by Bulgarian artist Jivko Sedlarski, while vintage French furniture on the seating platform adds another sculptural element.



**W**hen an established city garden is stripped out to allow for new underground rooms to be added to the house, there's the chance to make something very different. But for garden designer Chris Moss, who worked closely with architect Sally Mackereth of Studio Mackereth on the renovation of this apartment on the ground floor and basement of what was once a Victorian artist's studio in Chelsea, London, there were restrictions to consider before he could pick up a pencil. More than 70 per cent of the brick-walled plot has a maximum planting depth of 40cm that rather rules out large specimen trees. East facing, it is in the shade of the tall house from midday onwards; three of the existing trees had preservation orders and had to be retained; and there was a 3m-wide lightwell separating the house from the garden.

To retain a link to the apartment's artistic past, Chris devised a scheme strong in geometric lines and sculptural elements but with a richly textured, calm planting palette, predominantly in shades of green that suggests a woodland edge. Crisply laid Belgian blue limestone paving is used for the causeway that leads into the garden from the kitchen, for the seating area in the sunniest corner, and for the rest of the circulation through the garden, which is divided into a series of densely planted beds. Steps lead up from the causeway to a pathway that cuts a strong horizontal across the garden, dropping down via three steps to a sunken bed overlooked by the sitting room. "I wanted to keep the planting here low, to make it feel like it's flooded with green plants, as if you are looking down on a pool of water," explains Chris. Balustrades were required to create a safety barrier between the garden and the lightwell and here Chris has added an elegant solution in the form of fins of bronze-coated metal posts. "Glass balustrades would have been too harsh. The fins will also allow the ▶

**1** *Luzula nivea* Clump-forming grass that flowers in spring and softens the planting. 40cm. RHS H5<sup>i</sup>.

**2** *Dryopteris cycadina* A tall fern with black-stemmed fronds and evergreen form. Grows in full sun and partial shade. 90cm. AGM\*. RHS H4.

**3** *Geranium sylvaticum 'Album'* Grown for its matt, downy leaves and white flowers. 50cm. AGM. RHS H7.

**4** *Hakonechloa macra* Semi-evergreen grass with russet tones in autumn. Ideal for softening hard edges. Prefers semi-shade. 50cm. AGM. RHS H7.

**5** *Euphorbia amygdaloides* var. *robbiae* Spreading evergreen with lime-green flowers in spring. Ideal groundcover for dry shade. 50cm. AGM. RHS H6.

**6** *Brunnera macrophylla 'Betty Bowning'* A great groundcover plant with a feisty leaf and delicate white flowers in spring. Thrives in moist shade. 40cm. RHS H6.

\*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. Hardiness ratings given where available.



## GENERIC ELEMENTS COMBINE WITH A CALM, RICHLY TEXTURED PLANTING PALETTE

**This image** The choice of metal posts as a safety balustrade above the lightwell allows views across the garden from the house. Three steps create a change of level and enable the large, sunken bed to be seen from upstairs windows.



▷ planting to pop through the gaps.” More texture is created by two lines of hefty oak cubes that form a cladding in front of two of the retaining plaster walls that are painted white elsewhere.

By restricting the planting palette to shades of green, with pinpoints of white from early spring until autumn, Chris’s design celebrates the textural variety of his chosen plants. With the exception of the multi-stemmed *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*, which are omitted from the sunken bed, Chris uses the same mixture of plants in all the beds but in different configurations, depending on location. Groundcover plants include *Pachysandra terminalis* and *Vinca minor* f. *alba* ‘Gertrude Jekyll’. Drifts of perennials and grasses, including *Carex oshimensis* ‘Evergreen’, *Hakonechloa macra*, *Geranium sylvaticum* ‘Album’, *Luzula nivea* and *Dryopteris* and *Polystichum* ferns, create the next layer, with accent plants such as *Libertia chilensis* (in the sunniest beds) and *Pittosporum tobira* ‘Nanum’. Blocks of clipped yew provide a taller layer, creating a dark-green backdrop for the lighter greens and whites and an evergreen structure that holds the garden together in winter. Careful positioning of the striking red, metal tree sculpture by Jivko Sedlarski in front of one of the yew blocks ensures that it catches the eye in all seasons. The garden’s other contemporary artwork, an airy wirework of a pair of jellyfish by Benedetta Mori Ubaldini, dangles in the lightwell and is best seen from the basement bedroom.

The garden has an automatic irrigation system to ensure that the evergreen elements do not dry out. Maintenance is light: yew blocks are clipped twice a year, flowering plants deadheaded and tired winter leaves cut off the ferns. Four years after planting, it has settled into a lush tapestry of greens. □

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Chris’s work at [chrismossgardens.com](http://chrismossgardens.com)

**1 *Helleborus foetidus*** Ideal for shady areas. Its filigree new foliage is a bonus. 60cm. AGM. RHS H7.

**2 *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii***

The multi-stemmed form of this white-barked Himalayan birch is ideal for small gardens. Turns golden yellow in autumn. 6m in 20 years. RHS H7.

**3 *Libertia chilensis*** Clump-forming evergreen perennial with grass-like leaves and white daisy-like flowers in early summer. 90cm. AGM. RHS H3.

**4 *Dryopteris affinis*** Semi-evergreen fern with dramatic, yellow-green emerging fronds. 1m. AGM. RHS H5.

**5 *Pittosporum tobira* ‘Nanum’**

Mound-forming dwarf shrub with glossy foliage. Honey-scented white flowers in early summer. 60cm.

**6 *Anemanthele lessoniana*** A useful grass for tricky spots, such as under trees. The fountain-like clumps of evergreen foliage turn orange-brown in late winter. 1m. AGM. RHS H4.

**Clockwise from top left**  
Blocks of yew are staggered in the back bed, which increases the perspective. Clumps of *Libertia chilensis* create vertical accents above the groundcover plants. A metal tree sculpture by Jivko Sedlarski is silhouetted against the yew hedge. The light canopy of multi-stemmed *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* allows perennials and grasses to flourish beneath. A pair of wirework jellyfish by Benedetta Mori Ubaldini create a focal point in the lightwell, framed by columns of *Carpinus betulus*.