

10 things we learned from Chelsea

From lupins to moss, crazy paving to pine, there's something for everyone at this year's Technicolor flower show. Jane Perrone reports

1 The future's bright

Chelsea's purple patch - dominated by alliums, irises and salvias - seems to be in a slow decline, with this year's emergent colour scheme one of deep wine reds, burgundies and magentas, with patches of bronze. The Silk Road garden by Laurie Chetwood and Patrick Collins was the most dramatic example of the trend, but it threaded more subtly through many of this year's designs. Key plants for this trend are the plume thistle (*Cirsium rivulare* 'Atropurpureum'), *Lysimachia* 'Beaujolais', bronze fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* 'Purpureum') and red lupins. There were surprising splashes of orange, yellow and pink, too, from the bright orange giant Anglepoise lamp in Kate Gould's urban garden to the orange and pink walls in Manoj Malde's garden, inspired by the Mexican modernist architect Luis Barragán.

2 Say hello to the strokable plot

It's not always the brash plants that grab the attention at Chelsea: the tiniest details can draw you into a garden. This year, I have a major crush on mosses. The walls of gently mounded moss in Kazuyuki Ishihara's exquisite artisan garden and on the back wall of Matthew Keightley's Radio 2 texture garden were so tactile, it was a shame you couldn't go and give them a stroke. If you fancy recreating the look at home, *The Magical World Of Moss Gardening* by Annie Martin will tell you everything you need to know.

3 Lupins are back, back, back

After many years in the wilderness of plant fashion, lupins were everywhere: the rather restrained purple and blue varieties have been creeping into Chelsea gardens for a few years, but now even the bicolor varieties are welcome, such as the raspberry and yellow 'Tequila Flame' on Chris Beardshaw's garden for Morgan Stanley; and brick red 'Terracotta' and strong red 'Beefeater' on Sarah Raven's Radio 2 colour garden.

4 Pines got fresh

Forget box balls, silver birch and yew hedges, this year it's all about the pines, from the gnarly jack pines (*Pinus banksiana*) of Charlotte Harris's RBC garden, the several tonnes worth of Scots pine (*P. sylvestris*) in Chris Beardshaw's garden, or the mounds of dwarf mountain pine (*P. mugo*) in Matthew Keightley's texture garden.

5 Everyone upped their game

The companies selling high-end glasshouses, sculptures, fire bowls and the like have upped their game, to the extent that some Chelsea trade stands could easily be mistaken for show gardens. The shortage of high-profile show gardens this year (down to eight

Chelsea stars (clockwise from top left): Silk Road by Laurie Chetwood and Patrick Collins; M&G by James Basson; Manoj Malde's Inland Homes: Beneath A Mexican Sky; Chris Beardshaw's Morgan Stanley; Hibiscus 'Petit Orange'

from the usual dozen or more) allows trade stands to step into the gap. And from visitors' perspective, it's a chance to see top-quality planting schemes up close: trade stands actively encourage people to come inside their boundaries, unlike the cordoned-off show gardens. See how it's done in the plant-packed glasshouses of Hartley Botanic.

6 Crazy paving went large

You know that patio you (or your parents) pulled up 20 years ago? It may be time to consider bringing it back, only this time think big. Irregular-shaped supersized slabs in a random pattern featured in Charlotte Harris's garden and the Breaking Ground garden by Andrew Wilson and Gavin McWilliam.

7 Attack of the portable plants

Indoor/outdoor potted plants - things that live outside all summer, but need the frost-free protection of a porch, conservatory or cool room in winter - are growing in popularity. For those with small outside spaces and renters, such plants can form a portable garden that can move with you, or be shifted with the sun or your mood. For inspiration, check out the succulents such as the spiky agave (pictured above) and felted leaves of *Kalanchoe beharensis* in Manoj Malde's garden.

8 Reach for the sky

Chelsea watchers looked up as well as around this year, with so many gardens incorporating features with

serious height: James Basson's M&G show garden inspired by a Maltese quarry featured two limestone stacks, one of which was so tall it almost touched the branches of the vast London plane trees that overhang the site. Then there's the 4m-tall steel structures in Wilson and McWilliam's Breaking Ground garden, and the 3m-tall hornbeam hedges that enclosed Darren Hawkes' garden for Linklaters. You had to head up on to a raised walkway to view that one (or watch it on TV).

9 Designers saddled up

I couldn't help noticing an equine theme running through the show. There was a copper wire sculpture by Rupert Till of a horse's head on Manoj Malde's garden, Adam Woolcott and Jonathan Smith's artisan garden had a horse by Tom Hill Sculpture made entirely of horseshoes, and a series of horse sculptures by James Doran-Webb appeared on main avenue.

10 Hurrah for a new hibiscus

This plant, which Thompson & Morgan have put up for the Chelsea plant of the year award, is bang on trend: its showy orange flowers with a red centre are smaller but more numerous than those of a regular hibiscus, and it's compact enough to be treated as an indoor/outdoor plant. 'Petit Orange' also has dark, glossy foliage that will look good all winter while it enjoys a rest in a bright spot indoors. I can see this one flying off the shelves ●



Gardens

MARIANNE BARBER, JONATHAN BURCKLEY, NEIL HEEDWORTH, CHRIS