

A royally good kitchen garden

Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey, Surrey

The restored Royal Kitchen Garden is once again growing skirret, sallats and other esculents—and this time not for kings, but for commoners, says
Tiffany Daneff

PEAS were enormously fashionable in William and Mary's time. Indeed, such a thing were they that, in France, Mme de Maintenon, the morganatic second wife of Louis XIV, complained of guests disappearing to their rooms to scoff them by the handful.

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, Gardens Adviser to Historic Royal Palaces, is surveying the richly mulched and mounded-up growing beds in the restored Kitchen Garden at Hampton Court Palace, where rows of unusual peas are being trained up sticks. 'They had become a fad in late-17th-century France and then here, too. It was the first time people had eaten fresh rather than dried peas and it was considered incredibly luxurious to eat them straight away rather than storing them for the winter.'

If this quest for hand-picked rarities sounds all too familiar, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that, at the end of the 17th century, the variety of salad leaves was, if anything, greater than it is today and the list of stone fruits grown here (53 peaches and 'nectrons', 33 plums and 13 different 'apricocks', including Roman, Smirna, Masculine, Blackheart and Dutch) makes the mouth water.

Four full-time gardeners, along with seven volunteers, maintain the garden, situated on the old jousting grounds

With our current interest in kitchen gardens and growing our own food, where better to look for inspiration than this most royal veg plot?

Today, four full-time gardeners, with help from a team of seven volunteers, grow a great range of historic vegetables here, including one pea that grows unusually tall, reaching a bean-like 6ft high. Considering the vast number of beds, this seems barely enough hands and yet the Kitchen Garden today is only one-sixth the size of the original six-acre plot that was originally made for William and Mary at the end of the 17th century.

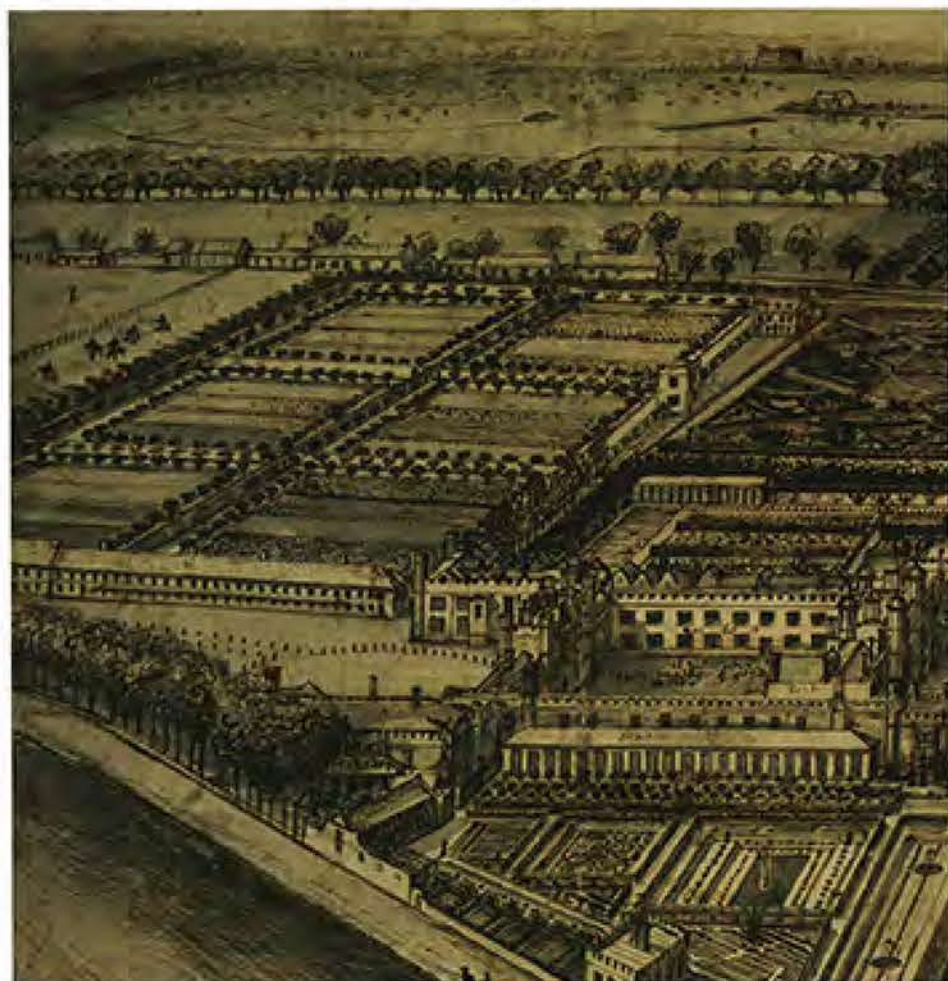
The ideal place for this royal kitchen garden was within the protective red-brick Tudor walls of the tiltyard made for Henry VIII and left as waste ground after jousting went out of fashion.

Now, as before, the gardens are edged with colourful annuals

The gardens were laid out by the famous London gardeners George London and Henry Wise, perhaps inspired by the Potager du Roi at Versailles (which was completed in 1683). Certainly, it contained many of the same features, the warm walls decorated with espaliered stone fruits, the broad perimeter walks lined with dwarf apple and pear trees and the narrow, earth-trodden paths dividing the growing beds just as they do today, following the 2014 restoration by Mr Longstaffe-Gowan.

Now, as before, the gardens are edged with colourful annuals and still visible over the high walls are the gable ends of the original 50-room Tudor kitchens, where all the produce was used.

For the following 150 years, the garden produced all kinds of fruit and vegetables, including much-sought-after melons, which had to be grown on hot, raised beds. After the Court left in 1737, the gardens were let



Detail from Leonard Knyff's *View of Hampton Court from the South* (about 1702), showing the original Kitchen Garden (top left) laid out by George London and Henry Wise

out to tenant gardeners, with one enterprising nurseryman, James Naylor, selling produce to the public through a hole in the wall.

Finally, in the 19th century, the decision was taken to close the garden and, bit by bit, the divisions were given over to other, deemed more pressing needs, such as a car park, tennis courts, a rose garden and a tearoom. The romantic heart of the old Tudor Palace was all but forgotten until the late 1990s when the Historic Royal Palaces Garden Strategy Group first saw the potential of bringing it back to life.

Surprisingly for a royal palace, there were no records and no inventories of plants or gardener's salaries, but Leonard Knyff's

View of Hampton Court from the South (about 1702) shows the original layout in detail. Contemporary sources, notably London and Wise's *The Complete Gardener* (1701) and *The Retir'd Gardener* (1706) provided the detailed plant lists on which the new garden inventory is based.

These days, nothing goes to waste. There's a weekly market stall for locals and staff can join a bag scheme, so, now, even commoners can enjoy whatever's in season. Skirret anyone (below)? This, should you be wondering, is a pale and thin root vegetable that was popular in Tudor kitchens and tastes a bit like a parsnip crossed with a carrot.

For more details, visit www.hrp.org.uk

More leaves than Ottolenghi

An inventory of 17th-century edibles similar to those grown in the Royal Kitchen Garden

Sallad seeds

Lop Lettuce, common, broad and curled Cresses, prickly Spinage, Rocket, Cabbage Lettuce, Silesia Lettuce, Nasturtium indicum

Sweet herbs and Pot-herb seeds

Winter and Summer Savoury, Sorrel, Beet, Borage, Buglos, Bloodwort, Orach, Tansy, Sweet Maudlin (sweet yarrow), Edward's,

Flanders and Green's early Hotspur Pease, Sandwich and Reading Pease, Grey and Green Roundivals, Large and Small White Sugar Pease, Large and Small White Kidney Beans

Esculent roots

Long, Round and Rellow Turneps, Swelling Parsnep, Black Spanish and White Spanish and London Radish, Rocambole (wild onion), Cardonne (artichoke), Succury (chicory)



In the garden



Small is definitely beautiful

A COURTYARD is the safest haven. Mediterranean ones have trees for shade, but our new English one is a sheltered suntrap for growing special treasures. When we moved, just over a year ago, one of the most exciting changes was a paved and protected courtyard about 20ft square, making a good-sized outdoor room leading off the kitchen.

I replaced the paving with hoggins, because wet Yorkstones in winter can look very dank. Gravel reflects the light as well as being a seed-friendly magnet.

It was what we had at our last house under the round table near the front door. The old table and chairs moved to occupy the new space and, on many hot summer evenings, we had supper in the courtyard, to the sound of screaming swifts on the wing.

We inherited a tangle of wisteria up and over the east-facing wall. This isn't ideal placing, but courtyards trap heat and, sometimes, you get away with sunlovers in shade. At Ninfa, the famous Italian garden, I noticed iris and ceanothus flowering in unlikely corners.

After radical pruning, the wisteria has plenty of flowers and I hope for more next year, but the winter tracery of anything pruned is a happy sight that's nearly as good as flowers.

In the narrow bed under the wisteria are some lilies of the valley, brought from our last garden. Scent is vital. Early in the year, there are wallflowers and lily of the valley and, later on, the smell of regale lilies or the Abyssinian *Gladiolus*



From left to right: *Myrtus Tarentina* Compulsory, *Coronilla Citrina* and *Salvia Cerro Potosi*

murielae is trapped by surrounding walls.

The existing flowerbeds were little more than a couple of raised beds, which we removed. In one, there were too many Japanese anemones and a huge bay tree, which made it impossible to grow much else. This was chopped to be replaced by the narrow-leaved form further down the garden. The anemones may take longer to evict. I love them, but they're too invasive in small spaces.

Raised beds only make sense if there's no soil at ground level. We have stony brash here, but most of the courtyard plants that I want to grow don't need much in the way of sustenance. *Coronilla glauca* Citrina, *Myrtus tarentina*, the bluest rosemary, Fota Blue, *Salvia Cerro Potosi*, lemon verbena and some Cedric Morris irises are all happy. So are my favourite roses, Bengal Beauty, *Chinensis mutabilis* and the delicate *Euphorbia ceratocarpa*.

Dan Pearson gave me a giant fennel for the hottest corner, where I've also planted a cutting of the fastigate box Graham Blandy. Because the kitchen windows are huge, greenery all year really matters. A couple of *ericsmithii* hellebores are the most recent additions. This winter beauty, which is a hybrid between species native to Corsica and Majorca, crossed with the *H. niger*, needs a sheltered place.

Big beds are planted so that there's always something to see from indoors

Flanking the steps from the kitchen, under the north-facing wall, we made big square beds, which are planted so that there's always something to see from indoors. Shocking-pink *Cyclamen coum* are a thrill all winter, with the earliest snowdrop Mrs McNamara out for Christmas and my favourite fern, *Polystichum Bevis*, staying green until March.

It was probably a mistake to put *Campanula poscharskyana* Stella at the back nearest the window. Even in the beastliest place, it sprawls and spreads, but it's evergreen and does flower

for months. *Viola Boughton Blue* is a politer plant in the middle of the beds, leaving gaps for plants of homegrown *Nicotiana glauca* in June. These beds work less hard in summer because there's so much to see beyond them.

No courtyard is complete without containers. All summer, *Pelargonium* Copthorne keeps going in two pots at the top of the steps, with a few smaller potted plants added as they begin to flower. In one corner, a giant urn holds a *Paeonia rockii* seedling; in another, a potted *Camellia sasanqua* and a *Nandina* seem happy.

For spring, the pots on the steps are planted with tulips and a current favourite is Columbine following *Iris* Lady Beatrix Stanley. Moss collected from the north side of stone walls is tucked in to the pots and looks more cheerful than brown earth before the bulbs appear. A few pots of wallflowers add extra greenery and are joined by pots of crocus, hyacinths or species tulips as they come into flower.

Courtyards are the best sort of small-scale gardens, with a chance to grow plenty of picky plants.

Mary Keen has moved from a big old rectory garden to a village garden where she relishes the challenge of 'restraint'

Next week: Garrigue planting

Horticultural aide memoire

Lily beetles

The lily beetle is one of those pests that has followed its host into our gardens and made itself at home. The beetle is very attractive, slender and scarlet, like an expensive sports car. Stop gazing and take action or your lily leaves will vanish and the plant will be covered instead in the beetles' singularly ugly offspring. The best method of control involves the use of no pesticide. The beetles like to stand about looking obvious, so pick one off and dispatch it with your thumbnail. If this is too much, crush it underfoot. You'll soon get used to it. SCD

