

Flow of ideas

A creative meeting of minds has produced a dramatic spring garden of contrasts, with water at its heart

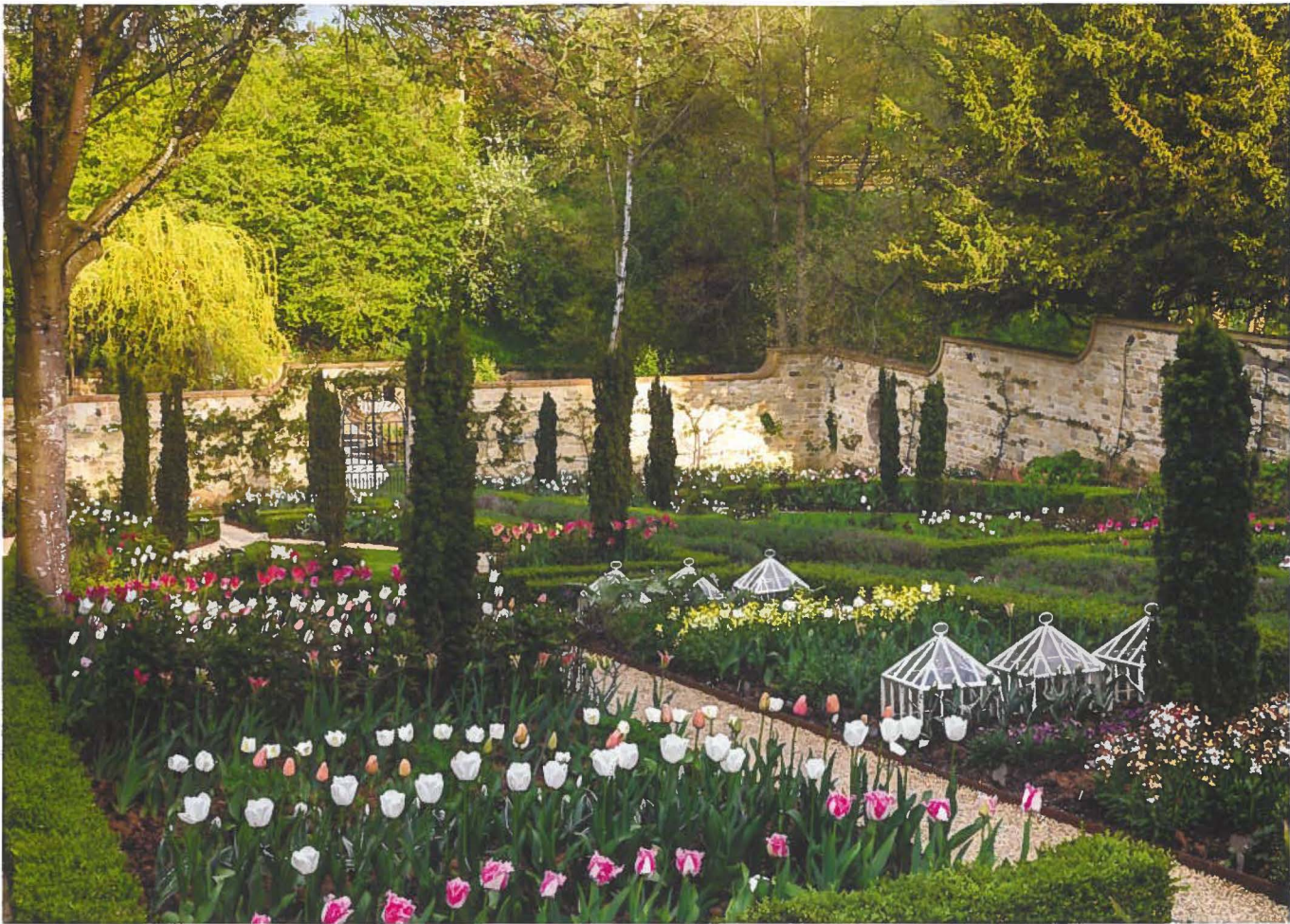
WORDS HANNAH GARDNER PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

IN BRIEF

Name Colebrook House.
What Private garden featuring a new, boldly designed walled garden.
Where Gloucestershire.
Size Three acres.
Soil Medium depth of rich topsoil, neutral to slightly alkaline clay.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 8.

A gloriously high, undulating yew hedge adds to the dramatic angles and strong structure of the parterre created by designer Todd Longstaffe-Gowan in the new walled garden. The cut-flower borders near the house provide a dazzling display throughout spring and summer with a succession of bulbs, including tulips, and annuals. The pretty Claverton cloches create a strong link to the beautiful Georgian orangery beyond.





Babbling brooks are a part of life in the prosperous Cotswold village of Blockley. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Blockley was at the heart of the English silk industry, and the Blockley Brook, which powered the mills, runs through the village and through the surprising garden of Colebrook House. Enter by its discreet gate, and a smaller body of water, the Cole Brook, draws you in, enticing you to follow its fern-lined course, crossing and re-crossing it via a series of small Georgian bridges, until it disappears beneath a grand lawn. Here, in front of the Georgian home of George and Melissa Apsion, you get a first glimpse of the garden's magical appeal.

In 2016, George and Melissa approached the garden designer Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, who had been recommended by the architect renovating their house. Their brief, explains George, was simple: they wanted Todd "to breathe life into the place – to create novelty, contrast, and surprise". Todd has answered that brief beautifully, creating an unexpectedly diverse and bold space that capitalises on the sloping garden's striking and irregular terrain.

It is very much a garden of contrasts, but with water as a unifying theme, adding both drama and moments of tranquillity.

Working closely with George and Melissa, Todd has devised areas that reflect the couple's love of Tuscany. They asked for a walled garden, so Todd created one that slopes down from a Georgian orangery, and used a series of fastigate Irish yews to evoke the formality and romance of Italian gardens. These evergreen sentinels punctuate and unify the parterre garden, creating vertical structure and, with their asymmetrical positioning, a "slight anarchy" that George rather enjoys. Their tall forms are trimmed back tightly to wire 'corsets' by the talented garden team, led by head gardener and Hidcote veteran Glyn Jones, to keep them slim.

In spring, the parterre is filled with a colourful combination of tulips, alongside fragrant perennials and herbs, and edged by low *Lonicera ligustrina* var. *pileata* hedges. Flowers predominate throughout the walled garden and spring bulbs are followed later by a succession of summer-flowering annuals and bulbs.

Further along, the spirit of Tuscany is conjured again by generous terracotta planters, prostrate rosemary that tumbles over

Above Todd used fastigate Irish yews in this newly created walled garden to remind the owners of holidays in Italy. The trained sour cherries that line the Cotswold-stone walls reference the more productive walled gardens of the Georgian era, but in this modern parterre the beds are largely given over to a succession of flowers for cutting. In spring, the area is dominated by a host of coloured tulips, including white *Tulipa* 'Très Chic' and fringed *Tulipa* 'Cool Crystal'.

Right, clockwise from top left

The yew buttons that spill on to the lawn are a nod to the silk-weaving history of the village, and create a wonderful dark backdrop for the white blossom of *Malus* 'Evereste'.

The Cole Brook cascades over mossy boulders into the historic mill pond garden, where a palette of greens creates a feeling of calm.

The mill pond garden was an existing feature that Todd has reinvigorated with new planting. Framed by a leaning willow, the shady space celebrates form and texture with an abundance of ferns and foliage, brightened in spring by the small, pale flowers of *Galium odoratum*.





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▷ walls and drifts of lavender that scent the air in summer. This broad terrace walk links the walled garden to the swimming pool, where Todd has planted a range of sun-loving, drought-tolerant species such as *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*.

From the terrace walk, a series of steps closely shadow the re-emerging Cole Brook as it softly cascades into a plunge pool, before merging with the larger Blockley Brook. In contrast to the neighbouring walled garden, the planting in this mill pond garden is predominantly green or pale ivory in hue; a densely planted mix of ferns, butcher's broom, sweet box, hellebores and a froth of *Galium odoratum*, with woodland bulbs having cameo roles in spring.

On the far side of the brook lies a naturalistic, grassy bank that is home to a tapestry of spring bulbs, followed later by wildflowers. On this side of the water, the garden team is trialling an experimental planting of evergreens including rhododendron, magnolia and michelia to create subtle and permeable screening at the property's edge. These shrubs are firm favourites of George's – a reminder of childhood visits to his aunt and uncle's home at Hodnet Hall in Shropshire,

where the gardens are full of camellias and other acid-loving plants. Thanks to Glyn's skill, the Colebrook shrubs are now thriving on this slightly alkaline site.

Todd happily admits his original masterplan for the garden has been "idiosyncratically corrupted and embroidered" over the years to respond to George and Melissa's ever-increasing interest in gardening. This deeply creative couple feel a little like a latter-day Gertrude Jekyll and Edwin Lutyens – George, a music producer, simply loves flowers, gravitating towards harmonious pastels, while Melissa, whose background is in fashion and design, has a keen eye for sharp design detail. Their enthusiasm is clearly boundless, and their unbridled appetite to experiment and improve will make for some exciting gardening ahead. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Colebrook House, Lower Street, Blockley, Gloucestershire GL56 9DS.

Web ngs.org.uk **Open** Open for NGS as part of the Blockley Gardens group opening, 23 April and 11 June, 2-6pm. Admission £8.

Find out more about Todd's work at tlg-landscape.co.uk

Above The Blockley Brook cuts through the garden, separating the formal areas around the house from the romantic meadow on the far bank. The bench is positioned to enjoy the soothing spectacle of the cascading Cole Brook in the mill pond garden.



8 top Colebrook tulips

1 Tulipa 'Innuendo' A bright and vibrant candy-pink and ivory Triumph with unusual glaucous foliage. A fun and refreshingly playful choice. Flowers April to May. 45cm x 10cm¹.

2 T. 'Blushing Girl' Rich ivory petals are marked with a modest edge of cool lilac-rose. Flowers April to May. 60cm x 10cm.

3 T. 'Florosa' A graceful, viridiflora. The shapely, slender petals are cream, strongly streaked with green and pastel-pink tips. The wonderful shape develops as it matures, bringing a sense of dynamism to schemes. Flowers April to May. 45cm x 10cm.

4 T. 'Lady Jane' A slight but striking tulip, bred from *T. clusiana*, that will happily naturalise if given free-draining soil. The outer petals are washed in pink and demurely open out in the sun. Flowers April to May. 40cm x 10cm. AGM*.

5 T. 'Cool Crystal' An exuberant double that packs a punch. The layered and fringed petals are deep pink with flashes of white at the base. Flowers April to May. 45cm x 10cm.

6 T. 'Angélique' The colour of the soft blush-pink petals on this showy double deepen with age. It has strong stems and makes a spectacular cut flower. Flowers May. 45cm x 10cm.

7 T. 'Spring Green' This viridiflora is one of the best for naturalising as it tends to return year after year. Enjoys partial shade. Flowers May. 50cm x 10cm. AGM.

8 T. 'Flaming Flag' An eye-catching broken Triumph tulip, with white petals beautifully marked with soft-purple flames, and handsome grey-green leaves. Flowers April. 55cm x 15cm.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
¹Tulips shown have a hardiness rating of RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.