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glorious gardens

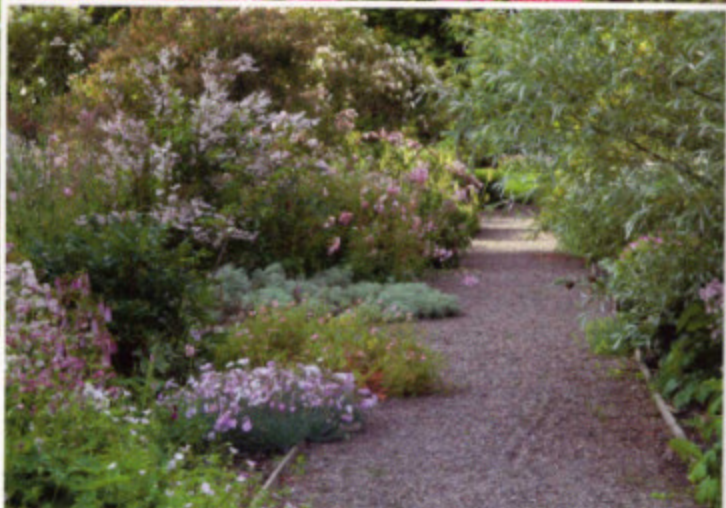




*Violas are  
blue...*

...yellow, purple and white, and thriving among the many colourful cottage garden plants grown at Ellenbank nursery in Kirkcudbright, Scotland ▶

PHOTOGRAPHS VAL CORBETT WORDS CHRISTOPHER HOLLIDAY



If you are looking for a varied and unusual selection of cottage garden plants, then the nursery at Ellenbank is your place. Nursery owners Elizabeth and Alasdair MacGregor have been enjoying an enviable existence for almost 20 years in their early 19th century home in the charming coastal town of Kirkcudbright, in south west Scotland. Surrounded by cedars of Lebanon, Ellenbank appealed to them because of its half acre walled garden - 'a good size to manage', as Elizabeth says.

The couple were keen to build up a nursery, concentrating at first on violas and clematis, gradually extending to cottage garden perennials. 'Violas must have one of the longest flowering seasons of all plants,' says Elizabeth, 'as they begin in May and continue well into autumn.' The south west of Scotland is one of the country's milder areas so it's no surprise to find many other cottage garden plants, such as penstemons, also thriving here.

*Driving through Kirkcudbright, you are brought up sharp by the colourful sloping nursery beds*

Fortunately, the MacGregors realise that not everyone can readily drive to Dumfries & Galloway, so they operate a healthy mail order business and exhibit at top flower shows, such as the RHS Tatton Park, Gardening Scotland in Edinburgh and their local show at Ayr. If you do have the chance to drive through Kirkcudbright, you are brought up sharp by the sight of the colourful sloping nursery beds from the road. There can be no better advertisement.

The delightful stone walled former vegetable garden is lined with brick to create extra warmth at the curved south end. However, it has been a backbreaking task removing barrowloads of rubble. Elizabeth surmises that the previous owners did not possess any dwarfing rootstock for the apples that once flourished here and that the rubble was probably dumped here to restrict the root run of the trees. Indeed, the soil is not much more than a spade's

PREVIOUS PAGE Viola stock bed, with the early 19th century house behind. ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Astrantia* 'Hadspen Blood'; a lively planting with pink *Achillea millefolium* 'Rose Madder' and dark leaved *Ligularia* 'Britt Marie Crawford'; soft coloured borders line a path in the walled garden; Elizabeth MacGregor among penstemons. FACING PAGE A brilliant combination of *Eryngium x zabelii* 'Jos Eijking' and *Potentilla* 'Flamenco'.

glorious gardens





FACING PAGE Dreamily delicate purple *Thalictrum delavayi*. ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Mingling golden inulas and daylilies; a rose covered pergola frames a romantic vista down the grass path to a decorative cast iron bench; *Potentilla* 'Arc-en-ciel', an excellent plant for the front of a border; Elizabeth tending seedlings in a greenhouse; the delightfully frilly flowers of *Leucanthemum x superbum* 'Old Court' (now known as *L. x superbum* 'Beauté Nivelloise').

depth in parts, so it has to be regularly fed with compost.

Entering through a gate in the south wall you are greeted by your first glimpse of the garden. The formal layout, which has some beds edged in box, contains an informal exuberance of herbaceous plants and prevents you from seeing the whole garden at once. But the general effect is of a colour themed sea of flowers interwoven with narrow paths. White blooms - a particular favourite - dominate the curved south facing end of the garden. White argyranthemums flower profusely from May to December alongside *Anemone x hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert', which flourishes under the light shade from the white rose covered pergola.

The borders on the east facing side blend from pale blues to vivid purples and vibrant wine and claret colours, provided by iris, *Knautia macedonica*, cirsium, dark maroon astringias, and a backdrop of dark blue and violet late flowering clematis on the wall. This leads to an area of hot colours - vivid orange and red daylilies, *Inula royleana* and red herbaceous potentillas.

The yellow creeping *Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea'

is used as groundcover among the taller plants and reflects the *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea' at the centre of the bed. This area is particularly effective in the evening light when the colours become almost luminous. In contrast, the west facing side is planted in soft pastel shades with lots of silver foliage - campanulas, astringias, iris, anemones, artemisia and shrubs, such as deutzia, philadelphus and silver salix.

'As the walled garden is essentially a mass of herbaceous planting,' says Elizabeth, 'I felt it was important to use the colours in a harmonious way, otherwise the effect would be overwhelming. I prefer colours to flow subtly from one area to another.' Without doubt, she has achieved this beautifully.

Ellenbank, Tongland Road, Kirkcudbright DG6 4UU. Tel: +44 (0)1557 330620; mobile: +44 (0)7941 546228. Open 23 April-4 October, Friday, Saturday and Monday. An annual catalogue is produced for spring mail order.

Turn over for garden notebook ▶

## GARDEN NOTEBOOK

Ellenbank Nursery covers four acres in south west Scotland and benefits from the area's mild climate and south westerly winds. The soil is free draining loam



### ALL THE BLUES

Invaluable *Anemone trullifolia*, which doesn't like intense heat, is an excellent true blue. Campanulas go well with the shrub roses, while the soft tones of the Japanese iris, *Iris ensata* 'Pin Stripe' (above left) also blend well with the campanulas. It's always good to add a bit of bite to the border by peppering them with eryngiums, extraordinary with their vivid metallic-blue flowers and stems. Propagation at Ellenbank goes on year round - herbaceous plants in the spring; violas (above right) in late summer and autumn.



### PLANNING FOR IMPACT

As the walled garden is essentially a mass planting of herbaceous plants divided by paths, it is important to use colour in a harmonious way, or the effect can be overwhelming. The hot coloured planting (above) in the walled garden includes *Inula royleana*, *Primula florindae*, *Digitalis grandiflora*, *Hemerocallis* 'Corky', the yellow leaved *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea', with toning *Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea' used a groundcover.

### CATALOGUE

• For an Ellenbank Nursery catalogue, send four 1st class stamps to Elizabeth MacGregor, Ellenbank, Kirkcudbright DG6 4UU, Scotland. Tel: +44 (0)1557 330620.



### ELIZABETH'S CHOICE OF COOL CLIMATE COTTAGE GARDEN PERENNIALS

*Anemone x hybrida* 'Königin Charlotte' has very large semi-double soft pink flowers, 120cm (47in).

*Campanula glomerata* 'Caroline' makes nicely spreading clumps of lilac-pink bells, 40cm (16in).

*Campanula punctata* 'Alina's Double' with pale, creamy pink, double flowers, 50cm (20in).

*Crocsmia* 'Ellenbank Canary' occurred in the middle of a clump of 'Canary Bird'. It is vigorous, more upright and has taller stems with large canary yellow flowers, 70cm (28in).

*Eryngium* 'Cobalt Star' (above) is a vigorous, multi-branching plant with intensely cobalt blue flowers over a long season, 70cm (28in). It occurred spontaneously in the nursery and was named by us a few years ago.

### ELIZABETH'S TIPS

• **Box edging is a slight problem.** Although it frames the plants within the border and makes a neat edge, the invasive roots of box are greedy. Unfussy, vigorous perennials, such as *Anemone x hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert', are undeterred by



box, however, and so they make good planting companions.

• **More for less.** Root cuttings of eryngiums produce good results. There's

a bit more effort involved, a little more wastage, but the end result is always interesting. In the nursery, we list a wide range of eryngiums and Oriental poppies, which are propagated from root cuttings during the winter.

