

The sense of place, history and creative endeavour is strong in the Veddw, Anne and Charles's garden in southeast Wales. This view looks over the mixed borders to a grass parterre based on an historic field pattern.

# Relaxed yet refined

Anne Wareham, known for her controversial writing about gardening, and her husband Charles Hawes have created a garden that is convincing on many levels: visual, horticultural and artistic >>

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There are some people who are fortunate enough to set out and 'make' a garden, and they do this for a variety of reasons. Often it is an antidote to city life, wanting to connect to open space and land; at other times it is for exploring visual ideas; and for some it is a form of therapy. For the creators of Vedd House, it was a combination of all three.

Anne Wareham and her husband Charles Hawes moved to this valley in Monmouthshire, about 5 miles north of Chepstow, 25 years ago. They were both involved with social work in east London but chose to leave the city and head to the countryside, primarily for Anne to take on the challenge of creating a new garden on the back of her premature retirement from work. Charles, while still in social work, is also a garden photographer and actively helps in the garden, but Anne, a blogger and garden writer, is the driving force behind its development.

Their creation, a garden covering 8,000sq m (2 acres), is a place that has traditional features (garden 'rooms', man-made vistas) yet is blended with a more contemporary and challenging approach to garden

making (a parterre designed to represent an old land map, or walls painted to mirror the colour of the garden's soil). Planting ranges from hedges of common yew (*Taxus baccata*) to sweeps of large-leaved hostas and the free-flowing nature of Anne's signature rosebay willowherb, *Chamaenerion angustifolium* 'Stahl Rose'. The end result is a substantial garden that establishes a strong sense of place and uses plants for visual (rather than purely horticultural) effect.

### Valley setting

On all sides, the garden is protected by mixed woodland (a further 8,000sq m/2 acres, including beech, oak, hornbeam and ash), which acts as a backdrop to allow the drama to unfurl within. The topography of the Vedd is important as it sets the premise for what Anne and Charles have done. From the 'top' of the garden – home to the formal Grasses Parterre and Pool Garden – you can look beyond the house to the other side further down the slope with its more natural, meadow-like feel. The site is one that many gardeners would dream of, allowing both a domestic garden feel in some areas contrasting with the dramatic,

### Framing the view

Looking over the Front Garden at the Vedd, the Monmouthshire garden of Anne Wareham and Charles Hawes, informal planting billows around structural plants such as rounded box balls and a dominant hornbeam arch (*Carpinus betulus*). The views beyond link the garden to its surrounding landscape.

❖ Key plants include: yellow-flowered *Lysimachia punctata*; purple-leaved yellow-flowered *Lysimachia ciliata* 'Firecracker'; a red-flowered rose; and *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple'.

wilder view of the valley and the undulating hills beyond.

When they first visited the Vedd in 1987, Anne and Charles were not only attracted to the house, but also to the potential of the land. Yet at that time, Anne says, 'the back of the house was just a field, and it wasn't obvious that the bowl of the topography existed' – what was to become a key feature was filled with trees. It now has an oval lawn at its centre, backed by a deep (3m/10ft) Crescent Border through which you pass to enter the formal hedging areas and garden 'rooms'. Throughout the plot they have made best use of the land, constantly channelling views in and out, mixing the intimate with broad sweeps.



## The Vedd

**Location:** Vedd House Garden, Devauden, Monmouthshire NP16 6PH; 01291 650836; www.vedd.com

**Summary:** a 8,000sq m (2 acre) garden surrounded by a similar area of mixed woodland; extensive use of hedges (yew, beech and box); garden 'rooms'; historical link to the site; in full flower from spring until Sept.

**Conditions:** wet throughout the year, and cold winters.

**Soil:** neutral loam.

**How old:** since 1987.

**Open:** booked parties from May 2013; individual visits every Sunday, 2-5pm, 2 Jun-1 Sept.

❖ *The Bad Tempered Gardener*, by Anne Wareham, Frances Lincoln, 2011, £16.99, ISBN 9780711231504



### Designing with water in two different ways

The tightly clipped yew hedges of the Pool Garden (above left) reflect in the shallow water – a dye is added to the water to make it 'black' which helps it contrast with the green of the hedge, the 'terracotta' of the low retaining



wall and the enclosing woodland beyond. Starkly different, however, is an informal pool near the house (above right) around which *Sempervivum*, *Alchemilla mollis* and white valerian are welcome to self-seed.

### Artful touches

Covered mostly in ivy and with one elevation painted black, the house is a small, relatively unremarkable cottage that seems to become increasingly invisible the more you explore the garden. Its owners have managed to let the garden become the main attraction and for the house to recede into its plot. This is an unusual trick and somewhat refreshing – often large gardens have a proportionally sized building to act as a counterbalance to the garden. Not here: this place is all about the garden, the way plants are used and the spaces that have been created.

In other areas around the garden, Anne's planting is on a smaller scale. At the rear of the house, a small pool includes a white waterlily; houseleeks



CHARLES HAWES

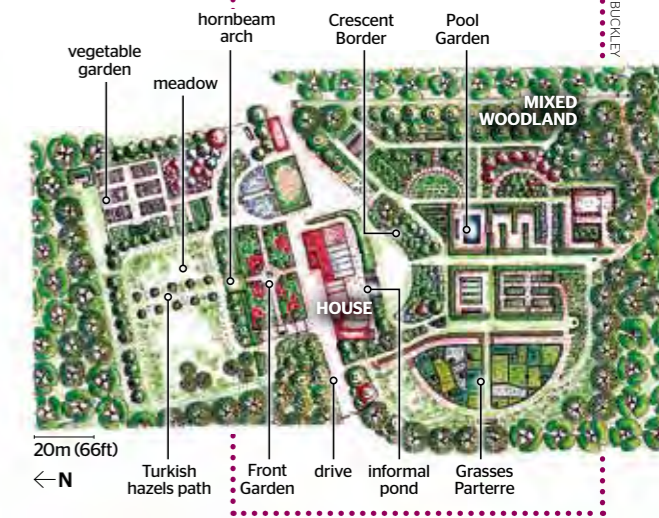
Anne Wareham and Charles Hawes.

(*Sempervivum*) grow from its wall, and *Alchemilla mollis* billows on one side.

At the front of the house, across from the gravel drive, more informal planting is contained amid substantial box

(*Buxus*) domes – *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer' jostles with yellow *Lysimachia punctata*, which in turn contrast with the deep purple leaves of *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple'. Much of the front garden area is informal, with plants interweaving through each other and across from one part of the planting to another.

Indeed, this almost-spontaneous approach to where a plant grows is part of how Anne and Charles garden. Anne has been vocal in her garden writing about why she 'hates gardening' and that the





labour of pruning, weeding, mulching, trimming and maintaining a garden is relentless. For many, such sentiments seem at odds with the size and complexity of the garden she owns. However, they use plants in a relatively simple way – grasses are grown in blocks; some plants are clipped into shapes or hedges; free-seeding plants (such as the rosebay willowherb, or *Campanula lactiflora*) allowed to grow where they end up; and climbers (such as a magnificent vine, *Vitis coignetiae*) permitted to stretch and reach ever higher. The end result is a curious mix of the refined and the relaxed, and the blend works well.

### Time and place

One of the most interesting parts of the garden is the Grasses Parterre. Anne and Charles have created a box-bordered low parterre that contains a variety of ornamental grasses. The hedging represents old land boundaries that can be seen on a tithe map of 1841, the grasses (including *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' and variegated *Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta* 'Feesey') refer to the surrounding agricultural landscape. A bench at the top of the parterre, painted the same colour as the Monmouthshire soil, has the inscription 'Vedow 1569, Veadow 1763, Fedw 1812, Vedw 1828, Veddw 1929...': a direct and fascinating reference to how the naming of this place has changed over the past 400 years. (Anne suggests the actual name 'Veddw' is derived from the Welsh for birch, *bedw*.) The bench is an addition to the garden that not only gives a visual link to the landscape beyond, but also brings its history to the fore.

*'This almost-spontaneous approach to where a plant grows is part of how Anne and Charles garden.'*



### Contained excitement

A view across from the eastern side of the Veddw (at one of the highest points) shows the differing forms and shapes of the garden 'rooms'. Having been planted just over 20 years ago, the yew trees give a structure to the place; the undulating beech hedge 'softens' the effect; behind it the Grasses Parterre mimics the field pattern found in an old tithe map of 1841. Mixed woodland surrounds the whole top side of the garden.

There is no doubt that Anne and Charles are passionate about their plot. However their view on garden making – and what gardens can be for – has set them at odds with many in the gardening world (recently, and most notably, with the National Gardens Scheme). Anne is the author of the book *The Bad Tempered Gardener*, and has been outspoken about the need to raise the concept of a garden as an art form. She continues to believe 'that gardens aren't always about gardening, but rather about being with friends, walking around

them, or enjoying the views within'. They are also honest about the cost of running a garden. 'It's hard work opening a garden,' she says, 'but the income helps pay for new machinery and also for help one day a week'. It is clear that she feels great pressure with nearly 1,000 people visiting a year ('the garden has to look good from late spring to September'), but equally gets a thrill from debating, talking and listening to people's reactions.

To enjoy the Veddw on a purely visual, garden-visiting approach is easy. It has plenty of interest, some sublime design touches, and is a place being constantly refined and improved. If you want to dig deeper, and understand or be challenged more, then its owners are keen to engage. Their frank and sometimes challenging views can both attract and repel people, but their desire to set out and make a garden with meaning has been well achieved. ●



### Bringing fields into the garden

This meadow-inspired part of the garden mixes long grass with annual and perennial flowers. The shaped Turkish hazels (*Corylus colurna*) link to the clipped formality of other parts of the garden – and allow a view down into the furthest part of the garden.

### Using hedging at the Veddw

Much of the success of this garden relies on the use of hedges, mainly common yew (*Taxus baccata*) but also common beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). As is so often the case both with contemporary and traditional gardens, hedges have proved to be a lifeline for creating space. 'When we first started on making the structure of the garden,' Anne says, 'we used a bundle of year-old yew seedlings. We didn't have much money, so went for the cheapest but smallest option...' – how difficult to imagine now, considering the dominance of the hedges.

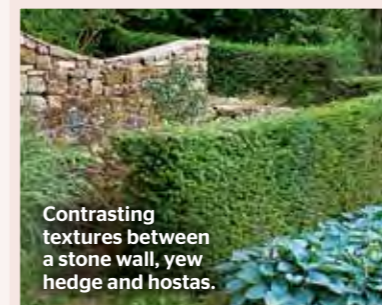
Cut into flowing strips, immaculate lines or undulating waves, the hedges bring a different character to different areas: for example, around the Pool Garden (pictured, p56), yew trees have been clipped into straight lines some 2m (6½ft) high, yet within the enclosure the hedges vary in height and have striking undulations to them (which are in turn reflected in the pool).

Elsewhere, an interesting two-tone hedge separates the formal Pool Garden from the Grasses Parterre: common beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) planted on one side, while on the other purple beech (*F. sylvatica* Atropurpurea Group). The combination plays with light and colour, and is a clever statement.

Collectively the hedges make the garden feel substantially bigger than it is, and help create light and shadow interplays.



This two-tone beech hedge adds an unusual touch to the garden.



Contrasting textures between a stone wall, yew hedge and hostas.