



Water, water everywhere

Water always adds a great dimension to any garden. See how beautifully it works at Laskey Farm, Thelwall, home to Wendy and Howard Platt, writes LINDA VINEY

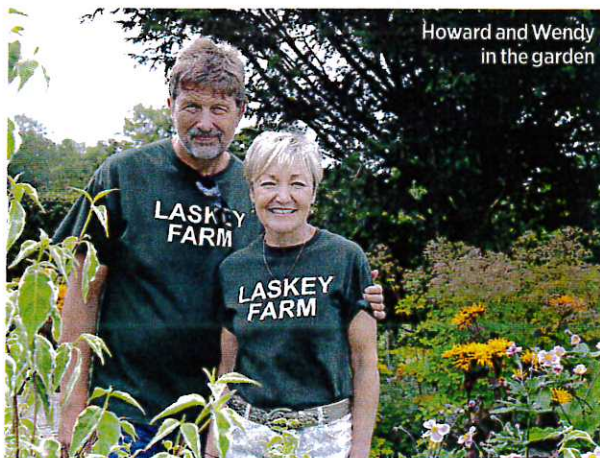
WATER can be a very striking feature to a garden, none more so than at Laskey Farm in Thelwall, near Warrington, the home of Howard and Wendy Platt. With a chain of five ponds interconnected with streams acting as filters to ensure the water stays clear working on the principle of septic tanks, all in all they contain about 50,000 gallons of water.

There is a wildlife pond, one which is a sanctuary for the 32 terrapins who have been rescued from people who bought them as pets and now outgrown their home, children love it and are only too happy to help feed them their diet of hot dog sausages or Spam as a special treat. The highlight is probably the fish pond that is also a swimming pool which is surrounded by a glass balustrade which helps to prevent the heron taking the koi carp who happily swim among the waterlilies.

This spectacular garden has different areas including extensive herbaceous borders, lawns, formal garden and rose garden not forgetting an area for fruit and vegetables.

This year, as part of the ongoing garden projects, a feature treehouse has been constructed which as its name suggests is surrounded by woodland with a path leading through.

Laskey Farm dates to the mid 1700's and operated as a working farm until the 1950's when Howard's father, Arthur, started the process of developing the farm buildings as commercial premises. Reminders of the farming past are everywhere with the surviving buildings, as far as possible, being



Howard and Wendy in the garden



Lawn acts as a pathway through the garden



Leucanthemum and helenium in one of the borders



Above: Parterre garden

Left: Enjoying feeding the terrapins

Below: A hare among the planting

named after their original uses. Laskey is thought to be derived from the Last Quay referring to the fact that it was once the furthest navigable point up the Mersey from Liverpool. The site is in close proximity to the Manchester Ship Canal with open views across the countryside, Howard is the fourth generation of his family to live at the farm.

As I entered through the red brick archway I was met by Wendy who told me as we began our stroll round, she gathered her love for gardening from her father-in-law, Arthur, who was a keen and knowledgeable amateur gardener.

'It was a responsibility when we bought the farm 20 years ago and seven years ago I decided to take early retirement from my role as an art teacher at a school in Warrington and further my gardening knowledge so went to Reaseheath College where I took a foundation degree course in garden design, as

well as studying with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). I now have gradually cut into the football pitch sized lawn creating different areas. As the site is flat it is important to make sure there is some height and structure to the garden.'

The first area I came to was a formal parterre with a raised brick bed containing lavender forming the axis. Leading on through the pergola which, apart from usual climbers had a vine where grapes were beginning to form. On one side a herbaceous border was filled with perennials and shrubs as was a large island bed. Wendy is keen to ensure there is all round seasonal interest and a Tulip tree, Amelanchier and Liquid Amber each one in its' own bed and are all planted for their gorgeous autumn colour. I commented on the lovely rural sight of horses in the field beyond but Wendy, although agreed, pointed out they had to put in an electric fence to stop them





leaning over and eating the hedge.

I couldn't take my eyes off the pristine edges of the lawn which certainly put mine to shame.

'It is thanks to my gardener, Steve, who has an keen eye for detail, though I must admit I am becoming obsessive as well,' Wendy smiled.

The white bark of the birch give winter interest and these have been underplanted with grasses which will rapidly hide the soil. Yellow helenium with the giant stipa looked magnificent as did the attractive verbena bonariensis with its purple flowers standing proud amongst the grass in the grass garden.

'They pop up everywhere as they self seed,' Wendy told me. 'So many people dig up the seedlings early on not realising what they are.'

Vegetables are grown in raised beds housed in a large wooded cage, this is sited alongside the Victorian style greenhouse. Paths lead you round the garden all of them flanked with different planting ideas and as we came to the ponds Howard joined us for these are his input into the garden, explaining as they are ▶



Pretty corner near the wildlife pond

"There is a wildlife pond for 32 terrapins who have been rescued from people who bought them as pets and now outgrown their home. Children are only too happy to help feed them their favourite snack of hot dog sausages"

all concrete based it saves the need for hiding unsightly liner. Children were busy watching the terrapins as well as searching for frogs and newts in the wildlife pond. Although Howard invited me to have a swim in the five foot deep fish pond, I declined as luckily I hadn't brought my costume. We criss-crossed streams which linked some of the ponds and Howard explained the importance of them as they helped to keep the water clear, especially in the fish pond. Tall dramatic gunnera made a statement as did the bulrushes.

A patio area by the house is planted with phlox and roses as well as agapanthus, while to one side the scent from the roses in the rose garden filled the air and this area is protected by tall shrubs where a path will take you behind the tree where a small ladder will entice you to pop up to the tree house.

Together they make a great team with Wendy's artistic eye and gardening skills and Howard's expertise is designing and constructing the water features it's no wonder the place is such a haven of interest and tranquility as well as making a great showcase for Wendy's garden design business which started six years ago with a close friend Christine Purslow. Jointly inspired by the love of art and design as well as their passion for gardening, every garden they are involved with is unique and individual to the owner.

'We were brainstorming name ideas one



Above: Colourful phlox
Below: One of the many roses



evening, and more or less as a joke thought of this one which everyone immediately took to, so 'Secateur Sisters Garden Design' was born,' Wendy added.

They have opened for the National Garden Scheme (NGS) for the last six years and raised in excess of £20,000 for the NGS and other charities. This year they will be open for the NGS on August 12th and 13th, from 11am-5pm, admission £5, children free. Home-made teas. ♦

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Planting by the pond