

All white *Rebekah Panayides*

Having been lucky enough to garden here for 15 years I finally feel like I'm getting things under control - we have come a long way from the rows of leeks in the front and the cattle paddock at the back that was the garden we arrived to. I'll admit it has taken me a little longer to reach this point than I thought, as I've had a family on the way and several years have been spent just garden-dreaming out of the window, with the occasional dash outside to keep the grass in check. Now the boys are older, things are easier, especially since they have discovered cricket and rush out with the mower themselves to maintain their 'pitch', leaving me with more time to garden.

Today I need to be more disciplined with my borders and try to find the right plant to fit the gap rather than the other way around. Over time most of my planting areas have gained a theme (albeit a little loose in some places), from the season when it looks at its best to the type of plant growing there, and I've found this helps me to structure my planting. But there's one border that has never really worked and having dug everything out over winter (with the aim of banishing ground elder) it's time to start afresh.

The hardest part is deciding on the theme. I have decided to go with a classic, it's a bit of a cliché and many have done it before to high acclaim - so no pressure!, but I want to have a go at creating a white border. If there's any ground elder left, which we know there will be, at least it'll blend in! Dotted around my garden I already have a core of suitable plants which all need rescuing from obscurity. For vertical effect I have the brilliant, upright, variegated grass *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Overdam' which is desperate for more sun and currently being suffocated in the shade of a viburnum. I have a few self-seeded *Stipa tenuissima* which will look the part into winter with their bleached blond tresses. Purchased recently and still imprisoned in its pot is the perennial *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Alba' which will provide white spikes, and for structure I have the cloudy grey, low-growing mounds of *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle' and the larger, *Elaeagnus* 'Quicksilver' which has elegant, grey, taffeta-like leaves. I'll also use *Crambe cordifolia* for extra height with its cloud of tiny white flowers in the early summer along with massive, elephant ear leaves.

It goes without saying that this will also be a good excuse to buy some new plants and I've a list ready; the architectural perennial *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Album' which has whorls of leaves on tall stems topped with white wands, *Stipa barbata*, another grass with wavy, curly seedheads, *Astelia chathamica* which looks like a silver-coated phormium and is a good winter statement, ditto *Rubus thibetanus* the white-stemmed bramble, although I'm not sure how well it'll behave, and good old *Anemone x hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert' which will look great with the grasses and work well into autumn. I'm planning my border for an autumn-winter show now and then once autumn is here, plant for spring with white hyacinths, white alliums and tulips.

The border will be gappy at first so I'm introducing some annuals. *Cosmos* 'Purity' will blend with the grass, as will the umbrella domes of *Ammi majus* and the huge white trumpets of *Nicotiana sylvestris* which will also welcome the evening wildlife with its strong scent. I love *Nigella hispanica* 'African Bride' which has a deep black spidery centre and the advantage of grey, glaucous foliage, as does *Omphalodes linifolia* an annual which is new to me but according to Christopher Lloyd is 'a useful annual for filling gaps, especially in a white garden'...sounds perfect.

I'm hoping to achieve a 'pale and interesting look' rather than a 'cool, frosty, cold-shoulder' one and, from what I've read, the supporting grey foliage is going to play just as important a role as the flowers. Other advice suggests using plants that age gracefully, unlike white buddlejas and white lilac which tend to look messy as the flowers fade to crispy brown (I wonder if my grass heads will look too dirty?) and because of the lack of colour the emphasis will be on the form of the flowers and foliage so I need to be sure of a good mix of shapes and textures to provide the interest.

I'm really looking forward to seeing my plans unfurl and having my garden day extended, as this white border will be at its best once the light starts to fade. Come the long summer evenings it'll be there to enjoy, especially once light has stopped play and my cricketers have upped stumps and retired to bed and all that remains is the quiet, ghostly glow of my white border. *Rebekah gardens in West Sussex*

