

“Vibrant bursts of colour progress round the garden”



Jilayne's small garden is beautiful and family friendly

Garden visit

Autumn is a rich and long-lasting spectacle in Jilayne Rickards' small back garden. **Annie Gatti** discovers how she's fired up this compact space with vibrant flair. Photos by Marianne Majerus

For gardeners with room for majestic trees and generous borders of grasses and late-flowering perennials, it's relatively easy to create autumn drama. For the owners of small gardens where every plant has to earn its keep, however, it's tricky to achieve more than one or two bursts of autumnal colour.

So the 16m x 5.5m back garden of designer Jilayne Rickards and her partner Simon, where autumn is staged with theatrical flair, is a bravura performance. For two months of the year they look out from the long kitchen table in their north London family home onto what Jilayne calls their 'magic show' of yellows, pinks, oranges and reds, most of which are provided by foliage and seedheads.

"Some people like their autumn display in one quick blaze, but I like protracted colour," explains Jilayne. "I have vibrant bursts of colour that progress round the garden, starting with acers and ending with cotinus."

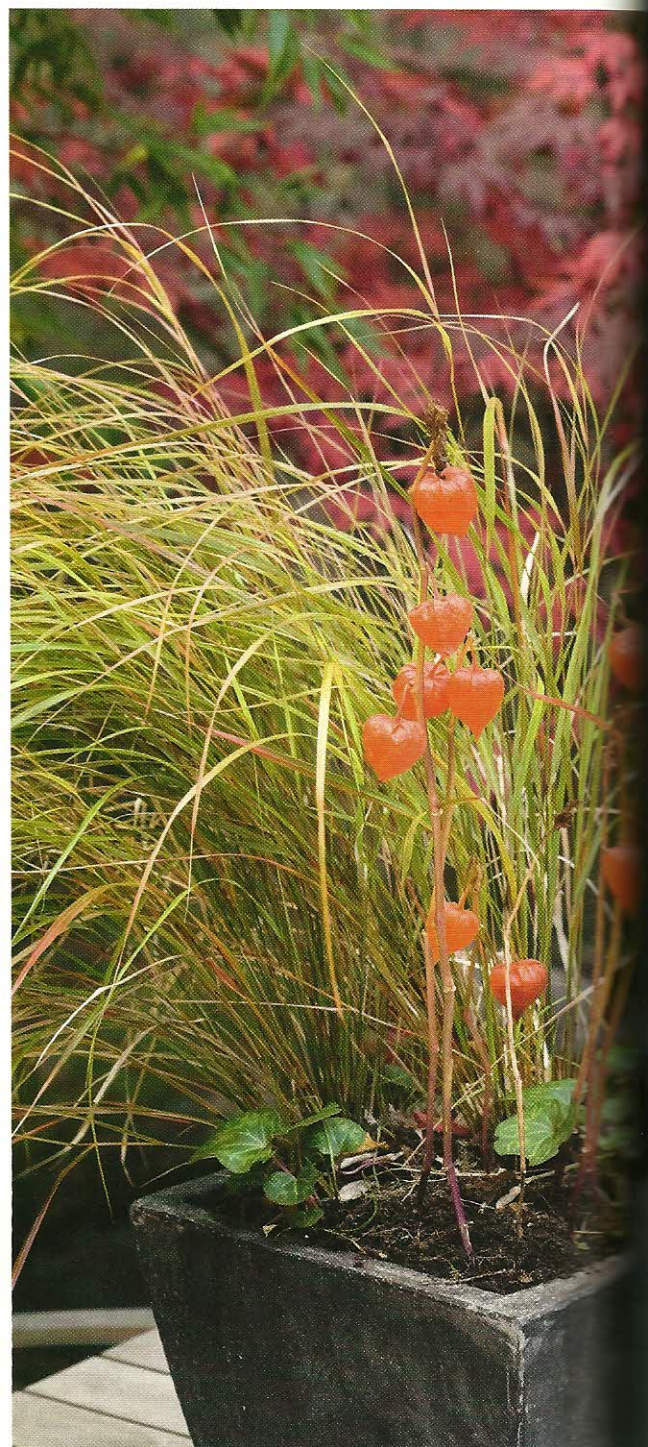
Awash with colour

The display starts with splashes of flaming red from two acers in dark containers on the terrace, along with brilliant orange foliage and cone-shaped crimson fruits of a sumach tree in the right-hand border. Sumachs, Jilayne says, make excellent trees for small gardens, as long as you control their suckers and check with your neighbours that they don't mind any

overhanging branches. Another acer, in a raised bed on the opposite side, blazes fiery scarlet while seedheads of tawny pheasant tail grass gradually turn from dusky pink to rich orange. In the left-hand border sedums create pools of pink, while soft-pink Japanese anemones are offset by the buff-coloured seedheads of *Miscanthus sinensis*.

As autumn progresses, a wave of yellow ripples slowly across the far end of the garden, created by the leaves of a chocolate vine, *Akebia quinata*, growing on an arch, and a line of *Cornus alba* 'Elegantissima' that screens off a seating area. On the side fence an evergreen *Trachelospermum jasminoides* is tinged with red, while on the end wall Chinese Virginia creeper, *Parthenocissus henryana*, turns scarlet. Finally, two smoke bushes, *Cotinus coggygia* 'Royal Purple', in the left-hand border, light up, rounding off the show.

Creating an inspiring view from the house was also a priority when Jilayne sat down to design the garden seven years ago. She had trained as a garden designer, opting for a career change with the birth of her third child, Holly, and her own back yard was her first professional project. Having grown up in Cornwall, Jilayne had a love of the colours and patterns found in nature. "I really connect with plant shapes, the way the salt wind in Cornwall creates mis-shapes and the way the sea forms watermarks in

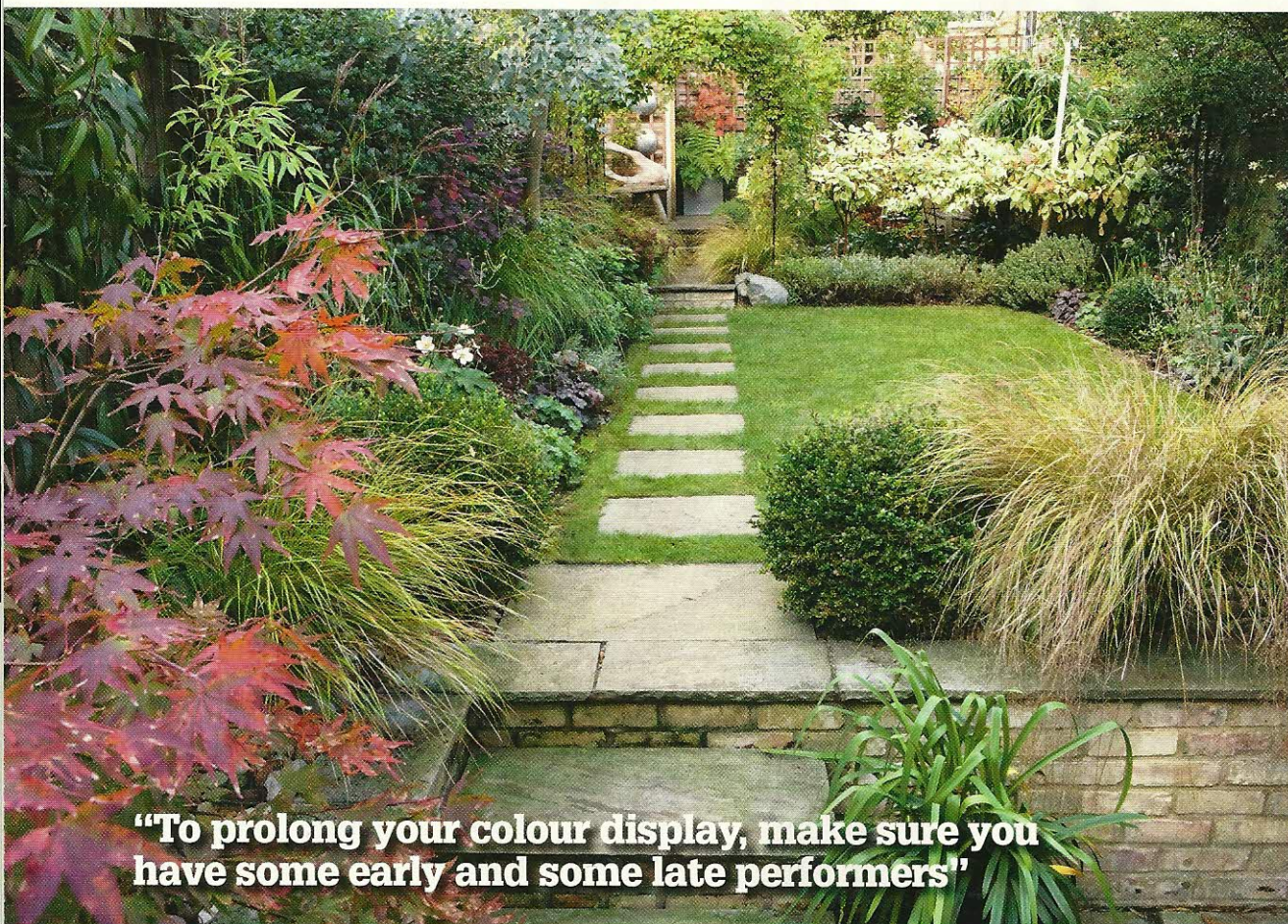


A pot of Chinese lanterns and grasses makes a table centrepiece

Gardens



The sumach tree's vibrant orange foliage arches over the patio from the raised bed



“To prolong your colour display, make sure you have some early and some late performers”



LEFT Waves of colour ripple round the garden
 BELOW LEFT The autumn display kicks off with the vivid foliage of *Acer palmatum* ‘Suminagashi’
 ABOVE The view from indoors soon entices you outside to explore
 RIGHT *Acer palmatum* ‘Bloodgood’ thrives on the sheltered terrace
 BELOW Bamboos and grasses sway and rustle in the autumn breeze

Jilayne’s tips for autumn magic

- Consider the effect you want to create, such as soft and dreamy or bold and dazzling, and draw up a list of plants that meet the criteria.
- Work from a palette of warm colours – yellows, reds, oranges, purples, pinks and buff.
- Plants colour up best in the sun, so watch how the sun moves round your garden. There may be areas that don’t get sun in summer but do in autumn. That’s what happens with my Virginia creeper on the far wall and it gives a fantastic display.
- Research the plants’ size, shape and colour and how long their seasonal interest lasts. To prolong your colour display, make sure you have some early and some late performers. Plants in shadier parts of a garden will colour up later.
- Acers are fabulous, especially in autumn. I find they don’t like full sun – on my terrace they get sun for just a few hours – and you must not let their roots dry out. I plant them in pots in ordinary John Innes compost, not acid soil, and feed with fish, blood and bone in spring.





the sand," she explains. This, coupled with a desire to create little pockets of the countryside in a London setting, made for the perfect career change.

The finished garden was a huge success and, although it has a relaxed, leafy feel, Jilayne's creation is a tautly designed space. It's based on a grid and its structure and planting shows the influence of her three design gurus: Christopher Bradley-Hole, John Brookes and Beth Chatto.

The garden presented various challenges: the back part is shaded by a row of mature chestnut trees beyond the perimeter wall and the soil is claggy clay that was stagnant in places. A narrow strip of concrete outside the kitchen door led up three wonky steps to a lawn that sloped steeply from left to right and down towards the house.

Jilayne knew what she wanted from the garden – year-round visual appeal and interesting plants with a loose colour scheme. She also consulted the rest of the family. Their wish list included seating areas and a place to entertain that could also be used for children's scooters and ball games (the boys wanted a basketball hoop), as well as a lawn, a pond and a shed.

First Jilayne worked out a ground plan to provide the basic structure. She used a 60cm grid to link with the wide casement doors leading out from the kitchen, and overcame the slopes by creating three levels. She



ILLUSTRATION: LIZ PEPPERELL



included a deep sandstone terrace next to the house, as an eating and play area, and edged it with raised beds. From here, three sandstone-topped steps lead up to the lawn, which is framed by deep borders. Another step leads through a metal archway to a split-level seating area at the back, with a bench and the shed on the higher platform. Jilayne chose a rectilinear design, because she feels it gives a greater sense of space in a small garden. "Curves need space, otherwise they can look tight and mean," she explains, "and you end up feeling cramped."

Before she started planting the garden Jilayne spent months digging over the soil, adding copious amounts of grit and horse manure. She still mulches with manure every spring and feeds most plants, including those in containers, with fish, blood and bone. The lawn is top dressed and reseeded when bare patches appear.

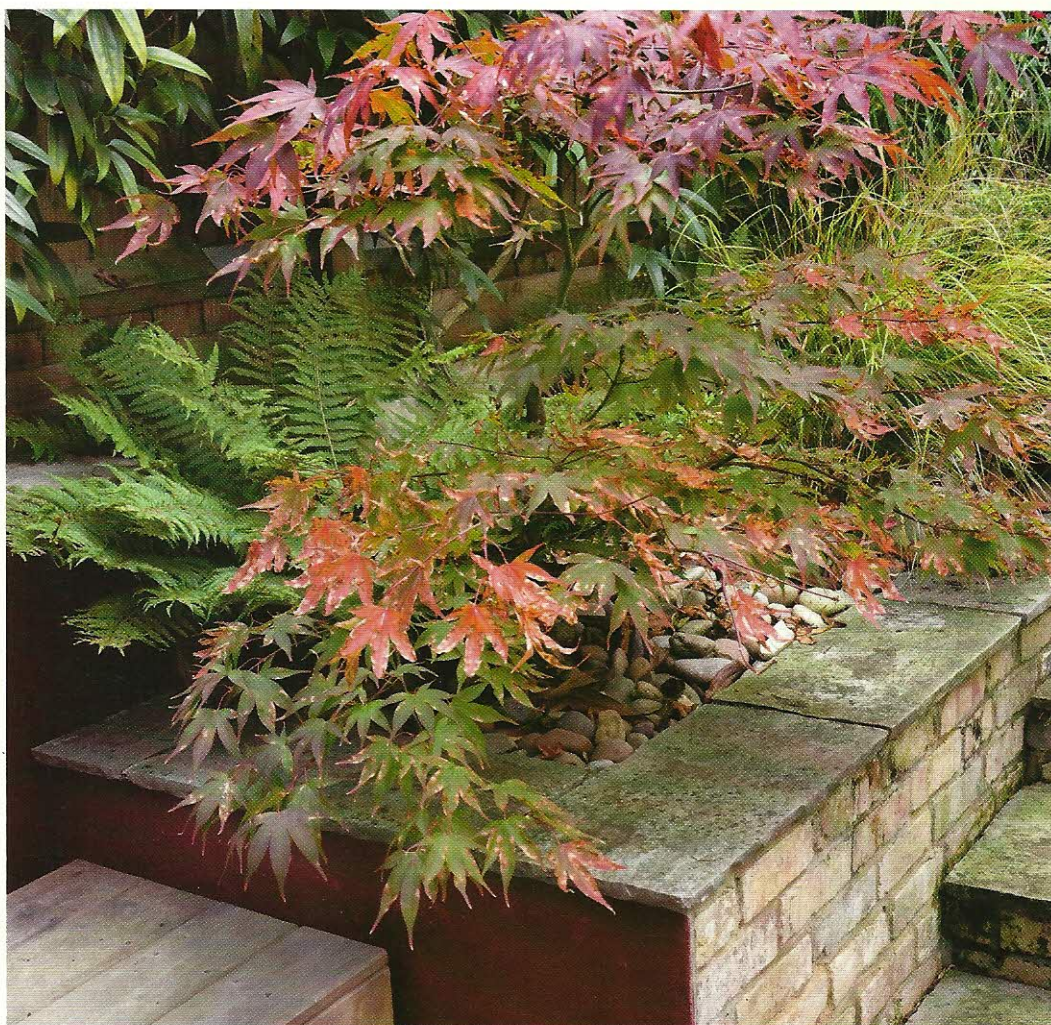
To create year-round interest, she planted three trees – a sumach, birch and *Eucalyptus pauciflora*, placing them at the three points of a triangle

(a design trick she learned from Beth Chatto). Evergreens include bamboos, lavender, hebes and pittosporum, as well as pheasant tail grass (*Anemanthele lessoniana*), which is one of her star performers and is repeated through the first half of the garden. At the shady end, euphorbia, bay trees, viburnum and choysya, plus climbers such as *Clematis armandii* and *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, provide year-round structure. The basketball hoop is on the kitchen wall and the only element she didn't manage to include was a pond – there just wasn't space. "Strong structure carries the garden through the winter," Jilayne explains, "and allows me to play around with colour."

Spring and summer colour comes mainly from herbaceous perennials, and although her initial colour scheme was soft blues and greys with purples and pinks, she has recently taken out several of the deep-purple plants.

"I was told at college to be careful about over-using purples and I now realise they were right – it can be a bit depressing," she says.

Jilayne has a relaxed attitude to pests: "I think that things feed each



Raised beds surround the terrace, bringing the contrasting foliage of ferns, acers and grasses up to eye level

Jilayne's autumn stars

TREES AND SHRUBS

Abelia x grandiflora
Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood',
 'Osakazuki' & 'Suminagashi'
Amelanchier lamarckii
Berberis thunbergii
Ceanothus 'Autumnal Blue'
Ceratostigma willmottianum
Cotinus coggygria 'Royal
 Purple'
Parrotia persica
Rhus typhina (sumach)

GRASSES

Anemanthele lessoniana
 (tawny pheasant tail grass)
Calamagrostis x acutiflora
 'Karl Foerster'
Festuca glauca
Imperata cylindrica 'Rubra'
Miscanthus sinensis

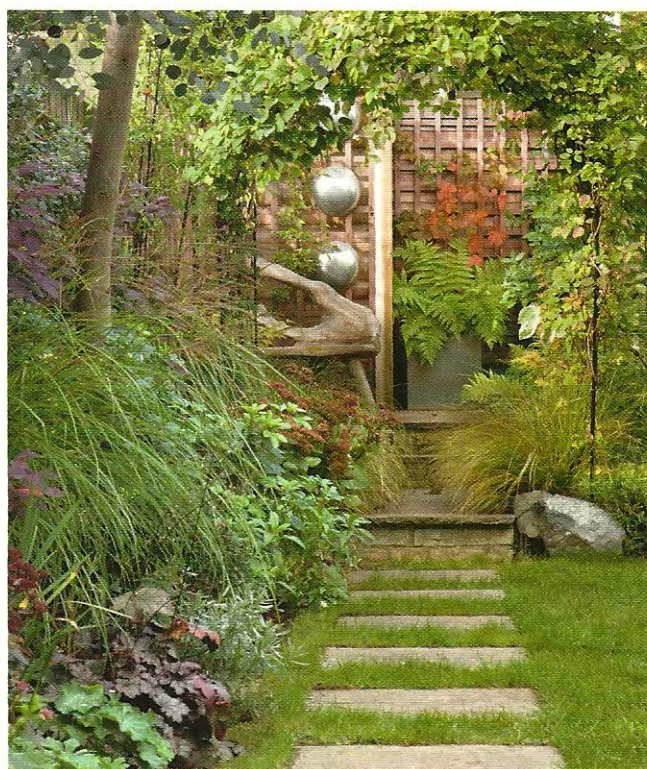
HERBACEOUS FLOWERS

Achillea 'Feuerland'
Crocsmia masoniorum
Echinacea purpurea
Helenium 'Moerheim Beauty'
Sedum spectabile

CLIMBERS

Parthenocissus henryana
Trachelospermum
jasminoides

"Strong structure carries the garden through the winter and allows me to play around with colour"



Slabs take the wear from the grass up to the hidden seating area

other. If I get an attack of aphids I leave them, as something else will eat them, and those insects will provide food for birds." But she is definitely hands-on when it comes to bare stems. Bamboo, pittosporum and cornus have all had their lower branches and stems stripped off to reveal their trunks. "To me it's like sculpture. You give the plant a whole different look. It also frees up space underneath, which is very useful in a small garden." □

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Annie Gatti is a freelance writer and co-editor of *The Good Gardens Guide*

NEXT MONTH We visit the garden of Mark and Suzanne, created with help from Joe Swift in his Design Made Easy series on BBC2's *Gardeners' World*.