

Pockets of purple
heliotrope and ageratum
contrast with red
snapdragons and
clumps of purple kale
in the unusual parterre.

Billowing BRILLIANCE

Tom Stuart-Smith is famed for his ingenious garden design which is matched by his artistic planting prowess. In the terraced, 'new' walled garden at Broughton Grange in Oxfordshire, his exquisite prairie-style planting comes to the fore at summer's end

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Clockwise from top
Hydrangea quercifolia
with *Euphorbia characias*
subsp. *wulfenii*; head
gardener Andrew
Woodall; the rill is
softened by perennials;
Anemone hupehensis
'Hatspen Abundance'.



In autumn, the garden's holding
framework is more diffused,
softened by effusive planting



THIS AUTUMN IDYLL, ABUNDANT, CALM and comfortable, was masterminded by Tom Stuart-Smith in 2000. In winter and spring, the geometry of the garden at Broughton Grange – defined by clean-cut hard landscaping, slick waterways and architectural trained trees – dominates. But when summer's profusion is engulfed by autumn, the garden's holding framework becomes more diffused, softened by effusive planting.

The Middle Terrace, a billowing Mediterranean meadow, punctuated by upright columns of yew, *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata', is consumed by a fusion of sashaying grasses, cushioned flowerheads and rattling seedheads. Head Gardener Andrew Woodall praises the prairie planting for its autumn ease. "Once the planting is in place, everything is simply successional," he points out. "We may tweak the mix, add a few more clumps of desirables, aconitum, sedum or asters, while thinning the more invasive elements, such as the phlox and geranium, to maintain a balanced meadow." Tom's prairie-style planting is organic, designed to evolve, self-seed and drift with minimum maintenance.

The planting is intrinsically bold, with integrated, comely clumps of similar plants rather than severe block planting. Edges are blurred, grasses merge or are spiked with flowering stems or architectural seedheads. Variety and repetition are key, plants enmesh creating a seamless tapestry. Grasses are the holding plants, abundant and purposefully varied. "Use about 25 per

A broad strip of *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant' and clumps of *Stipa calamagrostis* separates the parterre from the lawned slope below it.





cent grasses, as a guide,” suggests Tom, who favours *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* ‘Karl Foerster’, with bronze, spun-sugar wands that seem to float with light-catching transparency, and *Miscanthus* ‘Ferner Osten’, which glows bright coppery-red in autumn.

These are blended with golden oats, *Stipa gigantea*, which gives airy, ephemeral, height to the undulating planting, and statuesque *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Malepartus’, which holds dusky-pink, feathered plumes above cascading, fine-striped, silver-green foliage. Switch grass, *Panicum virgatum* ‘Shenandoah’, echoes these burnished hues.

Autumn colour is typically associated with trees, however it’s an essential element of prairie meadows, too. Tom encourages you to “think about the autumn colour of herbaceous plants” and highlights his dramatic colour-change favourites: *Amsonia hubrichtii*, which transforms into a ferny golden orb, and tickseed, *Coreopsis tripteris*, which saves its show of brilliant yellow, daisy-like flowers until late summer and early autumn.

Threaded through the gauze of grasses are spires of late-flowering perennials, adding colour to the buff or neutral grassland palette: brick-pink *Persicaria affinis*; *Persicaria amplexicaulis* ‘Taurus’, which Tom is increasingly using because it flowers for even longer; rusty-plumed rogersia; and the white pokers of bugbane, *Actaea simplex* ‘Atropurpurea’. Clouds of clumped flowers add bolder colour, dominated in autumn by soft violet mounds of *Aster* ‘Little Carlow’, *Aster x frikartii* ‘Mönch’ and *Geranium* ‘Brookside’.

Dusky terracotta *Hylotelephium telephium* ‘Purple Emperor’, *Echinacea purpurea* ‘Magnus’

Top left In the prairie meadow, mauve asters give way to phlomis seedheads as autumn progresses, punctuated by upright yew spires. **Top right** More acers are being planted for their autumn colour. **Above** A formal vista looks out to adjoining Oxfordshire countryside.

and pink Japanese anemone ‘Hadsen Abundance’ add a rosy glow, while flat-headed *Achillea filipendulina* ‘Gold Plate’, golden *Echinacea* ‘White Swan’ and *Phlomis russeliana* gild the garden. Steel-blue *Eryngium x zabelii* adds a metallic sheen to coppery desiccating grasses and seedheads.

All of these flowering perennials and grasses are crucial prairie-meadow components that linger all summer long, their colours and texture softening with the season. Come mid-autumn, structural seedheads form, while tiered whorls of burnished phlomis and bleached metallic eryngium stars add renewed architectural interest to the increasingly sepia-coloured gardenscape. This is the gardener’s ‘armchair season’, when Andrew advocates “just enjoying the colour and letting things be”. Tom echoes these sentiments, advising: “Leave things standing as long as you can bear them”.

The walled garden’s hard landscaping is more evident when the garden is winter bare, with the traversing and descending pathways and clean-cut rills less blurred. Throughout the garden, however,

are verdant punctuation marks: columns of yew in the Middle Terrace, quartets of pleached limes courting the axis of pathways and vistas, while tunnels of beech both bookend and frame the garden from the borrowed Oxfordshire countryside beyond.

The walled garden’s perimeter borders deftly mix the prairie feel with bigger, bolder shrubs, bringing their own autumn magic. Oak-leaved *Hydrangea quercifolia* bears flower panicles and hand-sized foliage, which both blush as autumn advances. Glaucous blue *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* adds a bulky, blue softness to borders, in contrast to the sharper, darker green of neatly clipped box and yew topiary. As time permits, Andrew’s team invisibly begin pruning and wiring in the garden’s evergreen framework. “You always need to be one season and one step ahead,” advises Andrew, who discreetly manages the garden to ensure it meets design expectations all year round. “There’s a huge amount of intricate work involved in the upkeep,” he explains. “Much of the work goes unnoticed or is unseen, but its effects are always ultimately evident.”

From the sharpened, paved edge of the Middle Terrace, Tom’s reinvention of the classical parterre comes to the fore. He has harmonised formal rigour with soft planting, by creating a sprawling, sinuous, low-lying box parterre, its irregular cavities iced with a sorbet of seasonal annuals. The

actual design, a softly carved living triptych, is based on the 6,000-times magnified cells of oak, beech and sycamore tree leaves. Its broad fissures are planted seasonally. In winter they lie bare, silvered by frost, letting the garden team trim and maintain the organic silhouette – a task that takes up to 200 hours. Come spring, 4,000 brightly coloured tulips add heat to a largely spring-green garden palette. Summer brings a cocktail of colourful bedding, which must flower from summer through to autumn, single-planted flower compartments deliberately juxtaposed to create a cacophony of colour.

Carpets of vibrant inky violet heliotrope butt against deep pink *Verbena rigida* ‘Santos Purple’, crimson-coloured snapdragons and golden *Rudbeckia hirta* ‘Prairie Sun’ shout out against the softer tones of *Ageratum* ‘High Tide’, *Nicotiana x sanderae* ‘Cuba Deep Lime’ and *Helichrysum microphyllum* ‘Silver Mist’. The rising star of the autumn parterre though, is bolting purple kale. A thick fringe of *Nepeta* ‘Six Hills Giant’ frames the

NOTEBOOK

Stuart-Smith style

Tom Stuart-Smith’s design for the walled garden at Broughton Grange includes many of his trademark elements and favourite plants



1 Topiarised beech stand proud above a sea of perennials and grasses, anchoring the planting and maintaining structure throughout the year. **2** Grasses such as miscanthus, are vital in the planting mix: Tom recommends making a quarter of your scheme grasses. **3** Long-flowering, reliable perennials such as persicaria, are stalwarts. **4** Trained trees often play a part, marking the axes of vistas or crossing paths.

CREATE A PRAIRIE MEADOW

By Andrew Woodall

- Choose a variety of different grasses for autumn colour and thread them through with autumn flowering perennials, such as asters, echinacea, eupatorium, monarda and veronicastrum.
- Plant blocks of the same variety, six plants per square metre.
- Allow plants in the prairie to naturally self-seed to create an organic, relaxed effect, but thin or weed out thugs to maintain visual balance.
- When necessary, introduce additional clumps of colour and architecture.
- The majority of prairie plants thrive on free-draining soils, so avoid conditions where winter wet and damp prevails.
- In autumn, mulch plants with composted bark to repress weeds, retain moisture, and keep the area looking neat and tidy.
- Divide and split grasses from autumn onwards to reduce the size of larger clumps and create more plants overall.
- Cut back grasses from late November when their seedheads are spent, although many can be left for frosted winter interest.



parterre edge before the garden slips away down a lawned slope dotted with comely yew, some arranged more formally, creating a walkway down to a grassy paddock. This area is under development. "A series of new stone focal points, a carved stone urn, tiered fountain and obelisk, have been installed to extend the sightline of the western axis of the walled garden," explains Andrew. The light woodland shrub and peat borders to the west of this are being planted with masses of acers to further augment autumn colour.

Tom Stuart-Smith's contemporary take on Broughton Grange's walled garden has earned it a place as one of three finalists in the European Garden Heritage Network's 'Best restoration or development of a historic park or garden' award. The walled garden's design, its use of plants, the seasons and the way it fits into the existing gardens and landscape, impressed the judging panel. Broughton Grange's adjoining, pre-existing,

Top An avenue of yews leads the eye to a statue.

Above left Colourful crab apple, *Malus* 'Evereste'.

Above right Tom's favourite, *Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster' with *Panicum* 'Shenandoah'.

traditional, long herbaceous borders and geometric parterres serve to heighten Tom's departure from the expected. They are gracious in their own way but do not evoke the excitement, emotion, and innovative beauty of the inspirational 'new' walled

garden. Tom shows us alternative creative garden design possibilities together with unconventional, uplifting planting that transcends seasons. ■

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Open Wednesdays, May to September, 10am to 4pm. Open for group visits by appointment. Tel: 07791 747371; broughtongrange.com