

# EQUAL SHARES

*Four quarters make a whole in a North Yorkshire garden designed by Tom Stuart-Smith with plants that peak throughout the year*

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## IN BRIEF

**Name** Middleton Lodge.  
**What** Historic, walled, kitchen garden designed by Tom Stuart-Smith.  
**Where** North Yorkshire.  
**Size** Two acres.  
**Soil** Well-drained and fertile.  
**Climate** Sheltered, but long winters and temperate summers.  
**Hardiness zone** USDA 9b.

In the walled garden at Middleton Lodge in North Yorkshire, informal perennials, such as the silver-foliage *Stachys byzantina* 'Big Ears' and the purples and blues of *Nepeta x faassenii* and *Campanula lactiflora*, are punctuated by tall spires of Irish yew, *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata', to create a strong, vertical axis.

I have visited Middleton Lodge for a few years, watching its transformation from a private house to a rural retreat and always wondered what was happening to the Grade II\*-listed walled garden. It was impossible not to imagine how magnificent it had once had been. The current owner of Middleton Lodge, James Allison, remembers when it was a working garden. "It was wonderful, but bit by bit it fell into disrepair. It was grazed by sheep, and became a Christmas tree nursery. As we gradually restored the rest of the estate, the challenge was how to make the walled garden commercially viable."

Abandoned walled gardens are not that uncommon, even though many of them have been restored with spectacular success. They had their heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries, when labour was inexpensive, but after the Second World War, when gardeners found better-paid work in the towns and cities, many walled gardens fell into decline. With little money for upkeep, most walled gardens went the way of Middleton, which is why, over the past few years, watching it go from wasteland to one of the most beautiful gardens in the north of England has been something of a miracle.

If James Allison and his architect wife Rebecca Tappin have presided over the restoration of this 18th-century estate with elegant house, it is the multi-award-winning garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith who has realised their plans for the walled garden. Tom is internationally famous for his large-scale public gardens such as RHS Wisley and the historic Italianate landscape at Trentham. Equally renowned are his designs for private gardens, with their prairie-style grasses and late-summer-flowering perennials. His brief for the Kitchen Garden at Middleton was to make an intimate space with something for every season, to function primarily as the backdrop to the Fig House.

While the design incorporates many of Tom's trademark elements, the result is more formal than many of his gardens, which have a certain wild and shaggy feel. Creating intimacy in a two-acre garden that holds its own in every season is not easy. Tom began by dividing the garden, which is all on one level, into four distinct areas designed to reach their peak at different times of the year. Each area has its own unmistakable character, designated by spring, summer, a prairie garden and a fruit and vegetable garden, the latter reflecting how the garden would once have been used. As one part of the garden quiets, another springs up, and there is always an area that is flowering, fruiting or sculptural.

Visitors gasp as they pass through a modest wooden door to enter the garden, rolled out before them in all its glory. Four domed, iron arbours, one in each area, built by the estate's construction team and trained with pears, white roses and wisteria, give the garden height and structure. You can peek through the slats from within, seeing others moving through the garden without being seen. Further height and texture comes from shrubs, such as the flamboyant Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*), which also provides colour and year-round interest with purple leaves in autumn, abundant crimson flowers on bare twigs in late winter and early spring, as well as attractive flaking bark. Tall perennials such as pink-flowered *Lythrum salicaria* 'Swirl', reddish-violet *Salvia nemorosa* 'Amethyst' and intense *Perovskia* 'Blue Spire' lend the garden a sense of romance and mingle effortlessly with *Campanula lactiflora* and swathes of low-growing *Geranium* 'Nimbus'.

Pathways that once would have been straight for ease of access now weave and thread their way through the garden, encouraging visitors to meander and stop to look around them. Evergreens such as *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata' (Irish yew) and box clipped into uprights or domes punctuate the wilder planting, and give height when everything else in the garden is low after winter. Retaining the fruit and vegetables has been a master stroke, with specimens such as the crab apple *Malus* 'Evereste' both practical and beautiful in nature.

Has it turned out as James expected? "Even better," he says. He has already commissioned Tom for an even more ambitious project, that of a Quarry Garden, a restoration project at nearby Barton Quarry. The limestone quarry is still being worked and isn't expected to be ready for development for another four to five years, but Tom is excited by the prospect of creating an amphitheatre and wildflower meadow there. But that is for the future. For now, there is much to appreciate closer at hand, as Middleton's Kitchen Garden revels in all its summer glory. □

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

**Address** Middleton Lodge, Kneeton Lane, Middleton Tyas, Richmond, North Yorkshire DL10 6NJ.

**Tel** 01325 377977. **Web** middletonlodge.co.uk **Open** The Kitchen Garden hosts open days throughout the year with tours led by the gardening team. See website for details.

#### Facing page

The pale, brick walls provide warmth and shelter, creating ideal growing conditions for many plants to flourish. Perennials have been selected for their long season of interest, for either foliage (the dark leaves of *Eupatorium rugosum* 'Chocolate') or flowers (the dramatic green, pink and ivory-coloured bracts of *Astrantia major* subsp. *involuta* 'Shaggy'). Many, such as *Geranium Patricia* (= 'Brempat'), will flower again once they are cut right back after the first flush has faded.



The garden is divided into four distinct areas designed to reach their peak at different times of the year



One of the four iron arbours trained with two cultivars of vigorous climbing roses. *Rosa* 'Sombreuil' is a heavily scented, creamy, blush-white, double rose with glossy, dark-green foliage, while the smaller-flowered *Rosa* 'Aimée Vibert' has sprays of fragrant, white roses, and blooms in late summer.



**Top left** Along the walls are plants that thrive in the reflected heat such as *Echinacea pallida*, *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty' and *Helictotrichon sempervirens*.

**Top right** Within the prairie style planting of delicate perennials such as *Catananche caerulea* (which also has long lasting, elegant seedheads) are clipped mounds of beech and the dark-foliage shrub *Cotinus coggygria*.

**Bottom left** The internal stone walls reflect the limestone country of the north of England and form a good backdrop to the strong purples and blues of *Salvia nemorosa* 'Amethyst' and *Perovskia* 'Blue Spire'.

**Bottom right** By the door in the walled garden, four crab apples (*Malus* 'Evereste'), which have pure-white blossom in spring and red fruits in autumn and winter, overhang borders planted with *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Munstead'.

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**This page** A sense of enclosure is created around the Fig House by dense mounds of perennials that hold their shape, such as *Salvia nemerosa* 'Amethyst' and *Persicaria amplexicaulis* Taurus (= 'Blotau'). These are punctuated with the seedheads of late-spring-flowering *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation'.

**Facing page** Long-flowering perennials, such as *Geranium* 'Nimbus' and *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Album', spill over the path. The plants here are deliberately low in habit, so that the rest of the garden can still be seen.