



# *Autumnal*

When Adrian de Baat discovered grasses and perennials it ignited a passion for the season. Now he has artfully combined elegant, swaying grasses with

Author: **Vanessa Berridge**, garden writer based in London and

## *de Baat garden*

35 Digsowell Road, Welwyn Garden City AL8 7PB; 01707 324074

**Size:** 1,350sq m (1/3 acre).

**Soil:** workable clay with good water retention.

**Aspect:** Northwest/southeast.

**Summary:** Town garden with naturalistic Piet Oudolf-inspired borders and island beds, intermingling bright perennials with a wide range of grasses.

**Key season of interest:** Mid-summer through to mid/late January.

**Age of garden:** 12 years in its present form (but the family has lived in the house for 35 years).

❖ **Open for the National Gardens Scheme, July 29, 2012, (2.00–5.30pm), and also by appointment June–October.**

# *abundance*

passion. Influenced by the Dutch designer Piet Oudolf, vibrant perennials in his Hertfordshire garden.

Gloucestershire. Photography: Marcus Harpur

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**O**n a glorious morning in September 2000, Adrian de Baat came across a nursery specialising in grasses.

It was a *coup de foudre*. 'The grasses were in their full glory,' he says, 'waving in the breeze, lit by autumn sun.' The nurseryman introduced Adrian to Piet Oudolf's 'New Perennial' style, opening Adrian's eyes to the possibilities that grasses and perennials offer.

When Adrian and his wife, Clare, moved to Welwyn Garden City in 1976, the garden was a mess. But it had potential, including a framework of mature horse chestnuts, ash and hornbeam, which probably predate the 1920s house. Initially, it was an ideal place for their children to play – only when Adrian retired in 1999 did he turn his attention to the garden.

## Colours and textures

'I wrestled for a while with what style I wanted to create,' he says. That autumn morning at the nursery provided the answer, although Clare needed convincing about filling the borders with perennials and grasses



**A view of the house (above) is framed by grasses and perennials. The garden in autumn is a blend of colour and textures (below). Grasses are used in abundance and mix well within a framework of shrubs and perennials.**

(despite enjoying using them for arrangements in the house).

The two main borders, which slope uphill from the house, seem to me masterpieces of design, magically combining restraint with abundance. 'Many grasses have amazing flowers at different times,' says Adrian, 'and create texture as well as movement.



They can be used as specimen plants, but also as fillers to separate flowering perennials.'

Around the perimeter, 2½m (8ft) high laurel and hawthorn hedges provide a backdrop to borders packed with blues, reds, purples and pinks (and the odd splash of yellow from *Verbascum* and *Achillea*). Within the borders, swaths of dark red *Allium sphaerocephalon* ripple between purple *Sedum 'Matrona'*, tall stands of *Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster'* and mid-height *Molinia caerulea subsp. arundinacea 'Karl Foerster'*. Taller grasses – such as lofty *Stipa gigantea* – are sometimes used as transparent screens at the front of borders.

Blue-flowered *perovskia*, *nepeta*, *Salvia nemorosa 'Caradonna'* and bright red *geums* bring sparks of colour to the borders, among plants such as white *Persicaria alpina* (syn. *P. polymorpha*). The graceful perennial *Sanguisorba tenuifolia 'Pink Elephant'* grows amid grass *Calamagrostis brachytricha*, which becomes burnt orange in September, contrasting with dainty *Briza media*.

In a spur of the main lawn an

## Great performers

Adrian de Baat recommends:



- ❖ *Miscanthus nepalensis*: golden flower tassels from September to January, with compact mounds of foliage. Needs good drainage. Height and spread: 1.5m (4ft) x 1m (3ft).
- ❖ *Stipa gigantea*: flowers, then seedheads, from June to January. Doesn't like crowding by other plants. Suitable as a transparent screen in borders. Height and spread: 2.5m (8ft) x 1.2m (4ft).
- ❖ *Anemanthele lessoniana*: evergreen grass which turns yellow then orange. Height and spread: 1m (3ft) x 1.2m (4ft).
- ❖ *Cynara cardunculus*: large leaves and good colour add stature to borders. Attracts insects Height and spread: 1.5m (5ft) x 1.2m (4ft).

unusual, intensely purple *Angelica gigas* is matched with echinacea, *Monarda 'Gewitterwolke'*, perovskia and a small red maple. Reaching out across the lawn, prickly *Acanthus spinosus* provides another texture, contrasting with fleshy *Sedum Herbstfreude* Group 'Herbstfreude'.

## Island beds

Beyond a frame of leylandii hedges (if I had a quibble, I'd wonder why they chose leylandii) many plants reappear in island beds that are linked by grass paths. Thanks to an introduction of exotic touches, the atmosphere changes dramatically. Red-striped *Phormium 'Jester'*, South African *Restio*, *Rhodocoma capensis*, *Echium pininana* and several *Trachycarpus fortunei* are underplanted with succulents, cacti, ophiopogon and agaves.

Adrian delights in the intellectual challenge of garden design and in the physicality of gardening – 'I never regard gardening as a chore.' This labour-intensive garden is constantly being rethought, but plant choices retain interest throughout the garden well into the winter months. ●



Seedheads of *Cynara cardunculus*.



Grasses blend well with autumnal tints.



Grasses including *Stipa*, *Miscanthus* and *Calamagrostis* mingle with late-flowering perennials such as *Rudbeckia*.