

# What is cottage style?

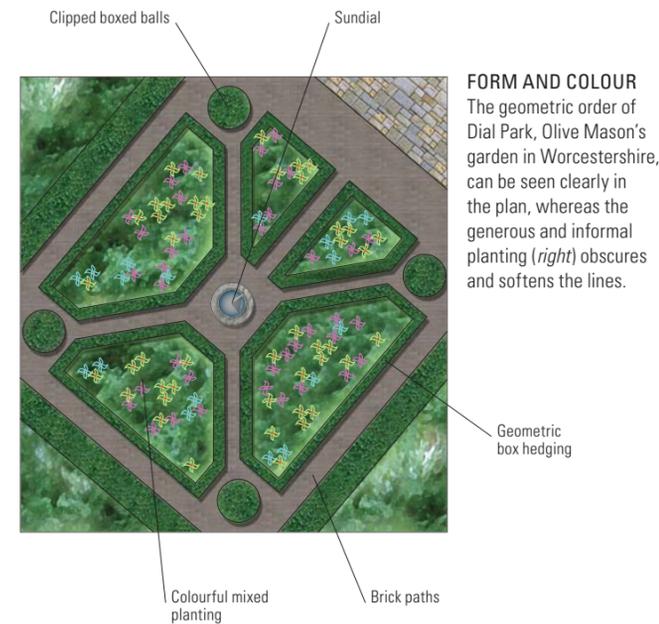
The romance of the cottage garden wins the hearts of many designers across the world. This is mainly due to the dominant force of the planting, profusion of colour, and the sheer variety of species used in this quintessentially English style. At its best, a cottage garden uses thematic or coordinated flower and foliage colour within small compartments or "rooms", as seen to great effect in the gardens at Sissinghurst or Hidcote Manor.

## COTTAGE GARDENS IN DETAIL

The layout of a cottage garden should be simple and geometric, yet many diverge from this pattern into more idiosyncratic twists and turns, especially as the design moves further away from the house where wilder planting dominates. Pathways are often narrow, so that the plants partially obscure a clear way through. This romantic planting softens the appearance of a garden, and brings you into close contact with scent, foliage textures, and spectacular blazes of colour.

The paved areas are constructed from small-scale units, such as brick, gravel, setts or cobbles, which allow mosses, lichens or creeping plants to colonize the joints and surfaces. Simple seats, old well heads, tanks, pumps, and local "found" materials make interesting focal points and create a serendipitous quality, while arbours or arches decorate the thresholds between the various garden spaces.

Lawns are used, but it is the planting beds that are considered most important. Elsewhere in the garden, fruit and vegetable beds retain the simple geometry of the earliest cottage gardens, with brick or compacted earth paths providing access to these working borders.



**FORM AND COLOUR**  
The geometric order of Dial Park, Olive Mason's garden in Worcestershire, can be seen clearly in the plan, whereas the generous and informal planting (right) obscures and softens the lines.



### Summer colour in a garden for all seasons

With its wide range of foliage textures, tumbling climbers, colourful perennials and perfumed flowers, Olive Mason's garden is planted for year-round interest. In spring, green and white foliage predominates, interspersed with subtle drifts of daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, and forget-me-nots. The colours intensify in early summer (above) to warm pinks and mauves, with roses, geraniums, delphiniums, clematis and centaureas. As summer progresses into autumn, the palette deepens to the cerise, deep blues and purples of asters, phlox, dahlias and aconites, and in winter everything is cut back to reveal the simple pattern of the box hedges, enhanced by a bark mulch spread over the bare beds.

## KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS



**1 PROFUSE PLANTING**  
Cottage gardens require intensive maintenance due to the complex planting. The art lies in the skilful association of planting partners, and the selective editing of species that become too dominant.



**2 RUSTIC FURNITURE**  
The patina of timber garden furniture changes organically over time; plants can be encouraged to weave through it to create an impression of apparently natural, but actually cultivated, recolonization.



**3 ROSE ARBOURS**  
These make pretty shelters for seating, and can also be used to link different areas. Here the intense colour and delicate scent of a pink rose help to awaken the senses on a walk through the garden.



**4 WEATHERED PATHS**  
Brick, stone sett, and gravel pathways provide textured surfaces as a foil to the complex planting on either side, allowing plants to seed and soften the boundary between path and border.



**5 VEGETABLES AND HERBS**  
Productive borders are often seen in cottage gardens, with cut flowers and herbs used in association. This attractive mix softens the functional appearance of these areas, and may also help to control pests.



Munstead Wood designed by Gertrude Jekyll.

## DESIGN INFLUENCES

The modern interpretation of the cottage garden is based to a great extent upon the work of Gertrude Jekyll and her architect partner, Edwin Lutyens. They created many outstanding designs in the 1890s under the auspices of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Jekyll used local cottage gardens around Surrey as the inspiration for her planting schemes, teamed with elements from her

Mediterranean travels and colour theories developed during her fine art training. Together, Jekyll and Lutyens designed and planted enormous borders in a luxuriant and romantic style, which brought timeless cottage-garden qualities to the estates of some of the wealthiest Edwardian families. Their approach set the agenda for the English garden over the next century.