

Netflix's first-ever RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden

- Sanctuary garden inspired by global hit television drama *Bridgerton*
- Secrecy, intimacy and privacy reflect the show's characters
- Garden's design helps people consider their identity and finding their true self
- Created by first-time designer Holly Johnston

A garden inspired by award-winning television drama *Bridgerton* comes to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show (21-25 May).

'The Bridgerton Garden', designed by first-time Chelsea-designer Holly Johnston, will have a secret garden appeal that encourages visitors to explore themes of hidden identity, feelings of invisibility, and the duality of character. It will also give people the confidence for them to be who they want to be, and to come out of the shadows and into the light.

Inspired by Penelope Featherington, a wallflower-like character from Netflix and Shondaland's *Bridgerton*, this sanctuary garden tells the visceral story of a woman's journey as she harnesses her inner resolve and confidence. The space depicts Penelope's story as she moves from an overlooked character to someone who defiantly embraces their true self.

As a first-time designer at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Holly Johnston is keen to underline that the garden is for everyone who's ever questioned their place: This one is for the wallflowers – the garden is designed to be a space for anyone who has been made to feel they don't quite belong. My garden offers a space to retreat to safety, to house your darkest fears, to recognise the good and bad within, to show up without your mask. And ultimately, to step into the light."



'The Bridgerton Garden', Photo credit: Holly Johnston Design /Garden Visuals

The space is delineated into three chapters or 'episodes'. Holly says: Standing at the front of the plot, visitors will see a moongate that beautifully frames the entrance to the garden. It leads to the second internal space which is a sunken seating area. Encircling an opulent three-tiered water feature and surrounded by a ring of characterful dwarf elms, this is where I pictured the character of Penelope sitting and sharpening her Lady Whistledown quill to write and share the salacious secrets of 'the Ton'. The third space is punctuated by a hand-carved sandstone feature engraved with a phrase that cements Penelope's growth. Finally, the curved path back through the garden uses planting which evolves from shade on one side to light on the other, providing a visual backdrop for the development in Penelope's character."

Like the series, this garden is not only beautiful to look at but also has plenty of hidden meaning and intrigue.

Holly explains: Throughout the three series of *Bridgerton*, Penelope Featherington's character has grown from a once almost 'hidden' and overlooked character to a young woman who isn't afraid to know and celebrate herself. The shaded space down one half of the garden alludes to the themes of mystery, turmoil and defiance with layers of ground cover, ferns and ivy representing a woven network of secrets. While the brighter planting – with a sophisticated colour palette of lilacs, pinks and blues – speaks to her evolved character."

One of the most iconic parts of the garden is the moongate, symbolic for centuries of new beginnings and welcoming. Stepping in and out of the moongate, deliberately designed as a portal that Penelope (or any visitor) can step through, you're transported into a personal sanctuary, a planted haven that has hedging and trees for screening, dense planting for interest, and intimate spaces for seating and contemplation. Holly says: "The moongate in the garden is symbolic of new beginnings, and is inherently feminine."

Holly adds: This beautiful space offers privacy and respite and is also a metaphor for women defiantly and courageously finding their voice – a rite of passage many can identify with. The moongate can be seen as a portal into that person's personal journey – and the ensuing garden shows the remarkable and personal transformative power of growth."

The planting reflects the themes of secrecy, growth, and desire. A ring of dwarf field elms, *Ulmus minor var. suberosa*, offers protection and enclosure around the seating area, while clipped spirals mix moments of formality with more whimsical planting.

Netflix says: RHS Chelsea Flower Show is truly an institution in the UK, with such a hugely passionate fan base. With the anticipated release of *Bridgerton* series 3, the week before Chelsea, the timing aligned perfectly to mean we could bring this garden to life and offer fans a moment to experience the beauty of the *Bridgerton* world. Working with garden designer Holly Johnston, the story of our central character Penelope and her journey has been beautifully crafted and thoughtfully mirrored in all of her design choices and we are so proud to be part of this historic event."

- **Bridgerton returns to Netflix for a steamy, two-part season 3 in May & June 2024. Part 1 will launch on May 16, 2024, & Part 2 will launch on June 13, 2024**
- The RHS Chelsea Flower Show will run from Tuesday, 21 May to Saturday, 25 May at the Royal Hospital Chelsea
- More information about [The Bridgerton Garden](#)
- The contractor for the garden is Stewart Landscape Construction
- The perennials and shrubs are being grown and supplied by Hortus Loci
- It's nearly 20 years since a moongate featured at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show ('Through the moongate', designed by Lesley Bremness in 2007)

- 'The Bridgerton Garden' moongate will be created by dry stone wall specialist team Richard and Lewyn Clegg from Yorkshire, the structure is fashioned from Derbyshire fossil limestone
- Another Yorkshire connection to the garden comes from stone sculptor Ryan James Johnson who will create the 1.8-metre-high hand carved wall fountain.

About the designer, Holly Johnston:

Holly Johnston moved from New York to the UK just prior to the Covid pandemic (in August 2019) and retrained as a garden designer at the prestigious English Gardening School at the Chelsea Physic Garden, graduating with distinction and first in her class. She is passionate about sustainable design and her approach balances formality with organic charm and understated elegance, often inspired by the rolling landscapes of her homeland in New Zealand. More information at: hollyjohnstondesign.com

Bridgerton Series 3 synopsis:

From Shondaland and new showrunner, Jess Brownell, BRIDGERTON is back for its third season and finds Penelope Featherington (Nicola Coughlan) has finally given up on her long-held crush on Colin Bridgerton (Luke Newton) after hearing his disparaging words about her last season. She has, however, decided it's time to take a husband, preferably one who will provide her with enough independence to continue her double life as Lady Whistledown, far away from her mother and sisters. But lacking in confidence, Penelope's attempts on the marriage mart fail spectacularly. Meanwhile, Colin has returned from his summer travels with a new look and a serious sense of swagger. But he's disheartened to realize that Penelope, the one person who always appreciated him as he was, is giving him the cold shoulder. Eager to win back her friendship, Colin offers to mentor Penelope in the ways of confidence to help her find a husband this season. But when his lessons start working a little too well, Colin must grapple with whether his feelings for Penelope are truly just friendly. Complicating matters for Penelope is her rift with Eloise (Claudia Jessie), who has found a new friend in a very unlikely place, while Penelope's growing presence in the ton makes it all the more difficult to keep her Lady Whistledown alter ego a secret.

Garden themes:

- A safe space – free of societal expectations and judgement.
- Movement and a sense of journeying – representing people's personal journey.
- Colour reflects an evolution and a decision to step into the light
- Dark and light, reflecting the imperfections of a person's character.
- Shady planting, illustrating Penelope Featherington's journey and how in this garden she can be fully, unapologetically herself. In this garden she doesn't have to hide her imperfections, her desires or her secret identity as Lady Whistledown.

Plant profiles:

To give a sense of privacy, there is a hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) hedge on two sides of the garden. A ring of field elm (*Ulmus minor var. suberosa*) trees create a canopy above the sunken seating; clipped evergreen spirals add height and structure.

There is an informal mix of climbers, shrubs, perennials and grasses designed to reflect a sense of ease. Planting is generally calm and muted, apart from specific areas that use a limited colour palette.

- *Rosa* 'White Pet': roses are often depicted in *Bridgerton*. This rose has been chosen to provide a sense of romance and enchantment around the moongate and dry stone walling.

- *Ulmus minor* var. *suberosa*: this specimen tree provides a majestic display with interesting and deeply grooved, blocky bark, chosen specifically to help create an interesting atmosphere.
- *Hedera helix*: excellent for wildlife, ivy provides charm and intrigue as it winds up tree trunks and scrambles over the dry stone. It provides layering of planting to develop a sense of place, but also works to build on the 'tapestry of secrets' that the shade planting is intended to represent.
- *Erysimum* 'Bredon': this bright yellow wallflower is symbolic of Penelope's journey. Placed outside of the moongate, it depicts the start of her journey in which her wallflower-like character will go on to bloom.
- *Carpinus betula* (hedging) and *Betula utilis* (silver birch): trees and hedging will be wound with ivy to help achieve a sense of a maturity and age.
- *Dryopteris affinis*: a variety of ferns, largely inspired by Holly's childhood in New Zealand will be included, including this *Dryopteris* which is, a vigorous, semi-evergreen fern with intricate arching fronds.

Q&A with Holly Johnston, designer of 'The Bridgerton Garden':

Q: Name of Garden

A: 'The Bridgerton Garden'

Q: Can you talk me through the story of the garden?

A: The story is based on Penelope Featherington, a wallflower-like character who evolves into the love interest in Netflix and Shondaland's third series of *Bridgerton*. My inspiration was to think of that personal journey so many of us make from adolescence to adulthood and reflect on how I use gardens and outdoor spaces for contemplation and working through different experiences and moments. I find these spaces provide a sense of grounding, calm, privacy and perspective. The actual act of walking through a garden; sitting and thinking in a garden space; responding to how hedges and trees provide a feeling of privacy and seclusion... all these elements were part of my design process.

Q: What were the challenges with this garden?

A: On a practical level, there are a number of challenges – from the design of the moongate to the placement of the water feature, the size of the trees to the sourcing of historical items. As it's a relatively uncomplicated space (in terms of levels or buildings) the fit and finish has to be top quality. It takes a huge amount of hard work and clever design to achieve a sense of ease and timeliness within a newly-built garden – I'll be extremely proud if we can build a space that feels as if it has been sitting there for many, many years.

Q: How did you come up with the idea(s) for the garden?

A: The design started with a moongate – this was always my primary and grounding component, not just for its striking features, but also because I could use it as a 'portal' to frame the garden narrative. A moment where one could step into another world – like the character Penelope does – and unveil one's secrets. I wanted to echo the circle of the moongate in the sunken area. The garden is ultimately a place for reflection and working through personal thoughts, feelings and challenges. As you step through the moongate into the sunken area, the design endeavors to provide one with a sense of relief, respite and privacy.

Q: What are the key features of the garden?

A: The moongate frames the garden and acts as both the entrance and exit. There's a fabulous sculptural monolith at the back of the garden which acts as a focal point. An ornate water fountain is at the heart of the garden, not only giving height and structure but also that lovely sound of running water.

Q: Are there any special features, plants, design elements?

A: My passion has got to be the plants, and I'm so excited about them. One side of the garden has a woodland feel which is very much inspired by my homeland of New Zealand. It's sheltered: there's a feeling of cool and calm here with the ferns, grasses and groundcover interplanted with *Digitalis* and *Brunnera macrophylla*. Turning to face the light, the other side of the garden is all about evolving to a sophisticated palette of colour, with abundant irises, roses, astrantias and geraniums. The trees are also a focal point in the design and are really important to me – not only are they brilliant for wildlife but they provide height, protection and a structural element. The trees I've selected, *Ulmus minor var. suberosa*, also have really characterful, corky bark which adds to the charm and historical feeling of the garden.

Q: What should the visitors look out for?

A: Well, the main thing is the privacy, respite and intimacy of the garden. Obviously the moongate and the water feature as well as some hidden elements that relate to the amazing characters from *Bridgerton*...watch this space!

Q: Tell us a little more about yourself?

A: I'm Holly Johnston, founder of my garden design business, Holly Johnston Design. I'm a newly-qualified garden designer and I'm thrilled to be designing at my first Chelsea.

Q: How long have you been working on this garden?

A: I started designing this garden last April. The base of my design started with a moongate concept, working as a portal for entering and exiting a garden. I've always been fascinated by this, and as I got more into it – and working with my sponsor Netflix – the concept has really come to life.

Q: What was the process of getting Netflix to sponsor a garden?

A: The stars aligned with the timing of *Bridgerton* Season 3 debuting the week before the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. I was lucky to work with the RHS on initial conversations with Netflix and curate a design that will work to bring *Bridgerton* to life in a beautiful show garden.

Q: Where did you get the inspiration for your design depicting Penelope's journey?

A: I researched the character of Penelope Featherington. There are metaphors in the garden – like a person's journey being represented by the path; the secrecy and privacy of the garden representing the gossip and scandal of Regency society (which *Bridgerton* is loosely based in); the flower borders representing someone's growth and personal evolution. All these ideas and thoughts interlink to make the garden come to life.

Q: Where did you study?

A: I received my garden design diploma at The English Gardening School in London, and have continued my learning with independent construction detailing, horticultural and CAD specific courses.

Q: What advice would you give to others new to the industry and wanting to pursue a Chelsea garden?

A: Do it! I can say the process is fascinating, terrifying, exhilarating and challenging all at the same time. It's the biggest gardening stage in the world, so you have to do it if you get the chance. Just be prepared for a lot of work....

Q: What did you do before you retrained in garden design?

A: I worked in the corporate world for 10 years, primarily in New York. I had been recruited to Syracuse University on a rowing scholarship, so it was a natural progression to move down to Manhattan after graduation. I started out my career working in magazines and editorial, and more latterly was working in marketing and sponsorship deals for big global firms. I was always a designer at heart though, so it was kind of inevitable that one day I would re-train to be a garden

designer. But I'll never lose that skill and knowledge from the corporate world, and I will bring that to any of my clients...and especially to this Netflix garden.

- For more information on Bridgerton visit: [Media.netflix.com](https://www.netflix.com)
- **Instagram:** @bridgertonnetflix
- **X/Twitter:** @bridgerton
- **About the RHS Chelsea Flower Show:** The Royal Horticultural Society is the UK's leading gardening charity. It aims to enrich everyone's life through plants and make the UK a greener and more beautiful place. More information at [rhs.org.uk](https://www.rhs.org.uk)
- **Main Garden Website:** <https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/Gardens/2024/bridgerton-garden>
- **Netflix page:** <https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/misc-shows/sponsors/netflix-bridgerton>
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