



The Down House, Itchen Abbas

In 2001 we arrived to look out onto a literally 'blank canvas' of field and meadow adjoining the house and apple and nut wood. So over the last 10 years we have striven to create a shrub and tree garden with an Arts and Crafts English feel, coupled admittedly with a very French vineyard and potager ! The south-facing garden lies on well-draining chalk but the flinty soil is only 9 inches deep, quite a challenge. We wanted to encompass the lovely views of the downland and so at many places around the garden you will find 'borrowed views' of the wonderful landscape of the Itchen Valley.

The Woodland Walk

This area of the garden is the oldest with the large oak (near our 'Lazy Days' sculpture of the schoolgirl reading her book), estimated to be over 300 years old. We put in a winding path through the wood in order to see at close hand in winter the snowdrops, aconites and the early crocus, all of which were planted many, many years ago. They naturalise with the wind and we have allowed them full rein. We built a wildlife pond and bog garden in 2008 to provide a safe haven for all kinds of fauna and this year were lucky to have a mallard and her brood take up residence !

The Rope/Gold Garden

Gertrude Jekyll was often fond of growing climbing roses up and through thick swagged ropes and also dividing a sloping area with stone walls and so this garden was created in her memory. The planting is predominantly yellow/gold and ruby/magenta with the *Cornus alba* 'Aurea', *Weigela* 'Rubidor', *Alchemilla mollis* and *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Goldcrest' standards really standing out against the backdrop of the *Cornus* hedges.

The Vineyard(s)

The first 150 vines (white : Phoenix, Seyval Blanc, Schoenburger and red : Regent, Dornfelder, Triomphe) were planted 6 years ago and the next 150 vines were planted 3 years ago inside the beech hedge. They are pruned by either the spur or Guyot (cane) method. The first wine was made, here at The Down House, in 2008 and 150 bottles were made from the 2010, the most drinkable being the rosé according to our daughter ! 1000 new vines (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier) were planted in April at the top of the meadow on our sloping, south-facing, flinty chalk terroir with the aim of producing an Itchen Valley sparkling wine in 2014. Our climate is now such that these grape varieties, traditionally associated with the Champagne region of France and other parts of the world, can be successfully grown in the south of England and produce award-winning sparkling wine.

The Winter Stem Border

Best seen in winter from the river, Jacquemontii birches, side, especially in the late afternoon light , the border comprises a number of dogwood species - *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' (red), *Cornus alba* 'Kesselringii' (purple/black), *Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea' (yellow/green), *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' (coral pink/red) together with the tall willow *Salix alba* 'Britzensis' (orange).

New for 2011

Winter 2010 saw 3 projects undertaken : a new winter stem border, a large potager and the glasshouse. The new Winter Stem Border was planted in waves of primarily willow species (*Salix alba* 'Chermesina' (scarlet), *Salix nigricans* (black), *Salix fragilis* 'Decipiens' (white), *Salix alba* var. *Vitellina* (gold), *Salix daphnoides* (purple), *Salix triandra* (black) together with *Cornus* cuttings from the existing winter border. The cuttings will produce new, vibrant coloured stems over the next couple of years. The Potager was created using the framework of the avenues of hawthorn standards (Paul's Double Scarlet) inside the semi-circle of native hedge species. This ornamental kitchen garden has been planted with U-cordon apples, step-over pears, standard roses and a variety of alliums and iris as well as ornamental box and bay. A whole variety of boldly-coloured vegetables, herbs and flowers are now growing in the 16 beds (red onions, beet leaves, curly lettuces, artichokes, runner beans, 4 types of squash, dwarf purple French beans, Borlotti

beans, green climbing French beans, red drumhead cabbages, purple sprouting broccoli, rhubarb chard, Swiss chard, broad beans, sugar snap peas, dark red kale (Rubidor), Cavolo nero kale, courgettes, leeks and purple Brussels sprouts !) The Glasshouse has seen an almost 'industrial' production of vegetable plants for the potager and is now host to tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and aubergines as well as a range of newly-sown ornamental flowers.

We hope you enjoy our garden this summer and come and visit us again next February when the garden takes on another hue!

Jackie and Mark Porter

26th June 2011