

How hard work transforms a garden

From a neglected plot overshadowed by enormous leylandii to a beautifully-maintained garden packed with borders and unusual features, the Franklins have transformed their outdoor space in Bibury. **MANDY BRADSHAW** takes a look

Pictures: Kevin Fern CHKFD20140528G-010_C



Owners - Alan and Liz Franklin in their garden at Greenacres, Bibury; left, borders topped by trellis are packed with interesting planting



WHEN Alan and Liz Franklin took on their Bibury garden it was a long way from ideal.

House-high leylandii hedges dominated the plot, there was little beyond some tired planting and the soil was Cotswold brash. Hardly the stuff of dreams but it suited them perfectly.

"It was a project," explains Liz. "We wanted something we could make a difference to, improve and turn into something we wanted."

Sixteen years on and the transformation is remarkable. Wide borders are filled with plants, pots brim with colour and the over-bearing trees are gone.

In fact, they spent the first few years taking things out rather than planting, not least around 100 leylandii, which were shredded and later used as weed-suppressing mulch on the new beds.

These borders are designed to be of interest throughout the year. One near the house is mainly spring plants, with winter-flower heathers and hellebores in a pink and white theme, but lavender ensures it still has something to offer later in the year.

Opposite, a long, mixed border makes use of repeated plants, including grasses, hemerocallis and golden spiraea, to give a unified feel.

There are large clumps of dicentra with dainty pink and white flowers, peonies and architectural globe artichokes.

Colours are chosen carefully; purple plum, photinia and purple cotinus are set against whitebeam and the pale foliage of *Acer platanoides* 'Drummondii'.

Replacing the old garage and moving the drive has enabled them to create a sheltered courtyard where Liz grows plants that can't cope with their limey soil, or which need protection over the winter.

Camellias, cordyline and daphne all thrive in pots and the watering is made easier by an extensive system of water butts.

A shrub bed of weigela, philadelphus and spiraea mixed with hardy geraniums screens the new drive from the house.

"I try to get a contrast of shapes and colours," explains Liz.

Meanwhile, a pump water feature has a simple planting of *Alchemilla mollis* and arum lilies that proves the point.

A homemade water feature is the focal point in the 'Pipe Garden', so called because of the drainage pipes that are now used as border edging and containers for dainty alpine.

Again, plants have been selected for their colour with purple tulips giving way to alliums, both rising up out of purple heucheras against a backdrop



Get the look

Old drainage pipes are a great alternative to a trough for growing dainty alpine. Fill with gritty compost and group together to create a display that can be moved or rearranged easily.



of climbing hydrangea. Japanese anemones and echinacea will carry on the display later in the summer.

Elsewhere, they have created a 'woodland walk' under birch trees with ferns, hostas and mahonia, while a small orchard with apples, greengages and pear is full of cowslips in the spring.

While Liz is mainly responsible for the borders, propagation and vegetables are Alan's domain. Two greenhouses, one kept frost-free over winter and a large polytunnel are used to raise hundreds of seedlings and cuttings. Already he is picking broad beans and lettuce, grown under cover, and more are developing nicely in the large, outside

vegetable beds. A fruit cage is full of berries and currants and apart from the odd bag of onions the couple are more or less self-sufficient in fruit and veg.

With no outside help, a large plot and a caravan site to run, keeping the workload down is a priority and Liz believes in working with, rather than against nature, welcoming self-seeded plants and growing only those things that will survive with ease.

"It's too big a space to be worrying about things that don't like it here."

■ Greenacres is open tomorrow from 2-6pm for the National Gardens Scheme. Admission is £4, children enter free. For more details, visit www.greenacrescl.co.uk

