



# A BUSINESS

# IN BLOOM

Tricia Kennedy utilises her passion for plants to produce truly unique arrangements filled with texture, colour and fragrance. **Antoinette Galbraith** finds out more

**Main image:** Newhall House with the obelisk monument erected for Robert Brown's godfather Thomas Dunmore.



Above: Statue reputed to be of Robert Brown in the heart of the garden.

Gardening is Tricia Kennedy's great passion and has been since she was first married to John and living in the West Indies. 'I stuck some poles in the ground to keep the cattle from coming into the garden,' she says. 'They started sprouting and I was hooked.' Back in Scotland she planted two gardens before the family moved to Newhall in 1998.

Here, the early 18th-century house, south of the Pentland Hills, featured a walled garden a short walk north of the house. Threaded by the River North Esk that lay beside it, the walled garden is laid out in elegant contrast to the semi-wild glen.

Designed in 1780 by Robert Brown, a wealthy Edinburgh advocate, patron of the arts and laird of Newhall, the nearly two-acre walled space was laid out in a traditional cruciform style, punctuated with tall box hedges and box edged beds.

At the heart of the garden stood a statue of a young gardener leaning on a spade, reputed to bear a marked resemblance to Robert Brown. An admirer of the poet Allan Ramsay, who wrote *The Gentle Shepherd* while staying at Newhall, Brown was influenced by the then-fashionable Romantic movement and sought to enhance the glen's wild characteristics.

He planted beech, oak and yew trees, some of which remain today. 'I was struck by the contrast between the structured and serene walled garden and the wild glen,' Tricia explains.

Previous tenants didn't have time for the walled garden, and a large part of it lay fallow and unloved. Tricia began the daunting restoration task with the help of part-time gardener Mark Robertson.

Tricia was keen to retain the original structure. 'I am not a garden designer, I am much more interested in plants, how they grow and how you can use them together,' she says. 'I'm not looking to put my stamp on the garden; I want it to evolve.'

Yew hedges, mainly planted by Robert Brown, responded well to pruning as did internal beech hedges. The central, cobbled yew path was cleaned and soon the magnificent double herbaceous borders were filled with colourful plants.

There was a lot to learn. Gardening at 900ft - when the surrounding walls are 16ft tall - taught Tricia the value of shelter and the need for plenty of evergreen structures. Fast-



Clockwise from top left: Original stonework in the walled garden; stonework and surrounding pathways; Tricia working in the main border; red admiral butterfly; glimpse into the walled garden; cutting flowers; inula hookeri.





“Being part of the Flowers from the Farm network gave me the confidence to take the plunge



**Above:** Original brick path leading to the glasshouse.

**Right:** A selection of flowers for cutting.

## FLOWERS FROM THE FARM

Founded in 2011 by Gill Hodgson, Flowers from the Farm is a network of over 500 UK-wide members with small businesses producing seasonal flowers not available in supermarkets. From Cornwall to Scotland, these artisan flower farmers are growing old favourites: sweet peas, bells of Ireland, dahlias and aquilegia, as well as new varieties. Flowers from the Farm hold workshops to improve members' skills and provide a place for meeting like-minded people. To find out more, visit [www.flowersfromthefarm.co.uk](http://www.flowersfromthefarm.co.uk)

forward ten years and faced with rising maintenance costs, Tricia began to research ways of funding the garden.

'I kept reading about farmers growing thousands of roses and alliums but we are too high and cold for that here.'

Knowing it would be impossible to compete with foreign imports, she thought about unusual, seasonal and fragrant flowers that would flourish at Newhall.

Ideas and confidence grew when she became the sixth Scottish member of Flowers from the Farm, the UK-wide network of horticultural enthusiasts who grow seasonal flowers on small patches of land.

'Being part of the network gave me the confidence to take the plunge. If you don't have enough for an order, you can collaborate with another member.'

Tricia now works closely with Annie Thompson from School House Flowers at nearby Skirling.

Asked to grow flowers for a wedding, Tricia sold the surplus flowers by the bucket from Newhall and a business was born. Some seeds are raised in a poly tunnel while others are sown in the south-

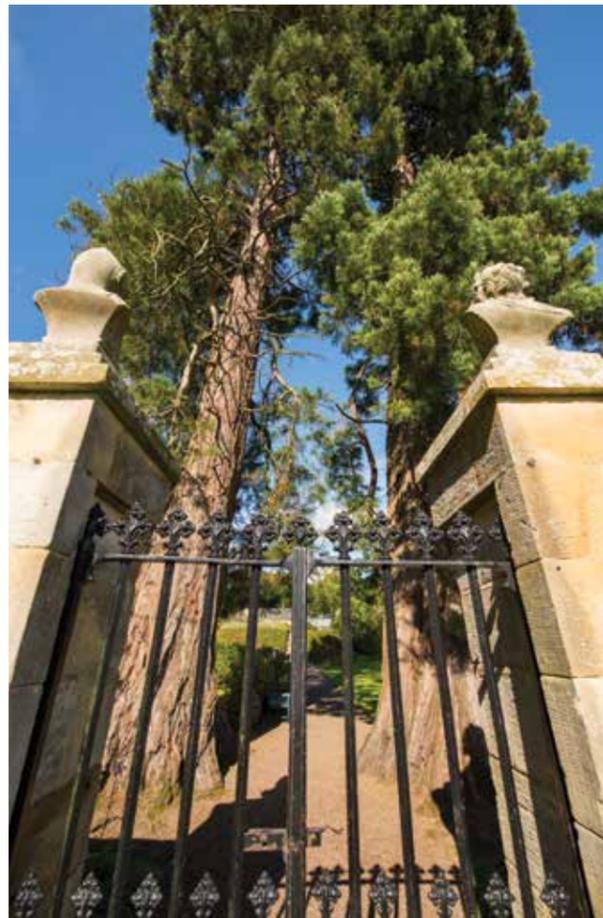
facing glasshouse in the walled garden, heated by the biomass boiler that also heats the house. A layout of raised beds, covered with miniature poly tunnels and irrigated with leaky hose pipes, was installed close to the entrance gate.

There was a lot to learn. 'The first thing I learnt is that stem length is important, especially when growing sweet peas,' says Tricia. 'Spencer varieties, for example, have the longest stems.'

These are successionally grown from October to January, March and April to ensure early flowering and to allow for cold weather related delays. 'They flower until the first frost.'

Annuals she learned, can produce up to 15 buckets of flowers from a single plant so are potentially 15 times more productive than most perennials.

Reliable and favourite varieties include blue and white *Nigella damascena*, clouds of white *ammi majus*, Tricia's favourite annual phlox – 'they last in a vase for three weeks' – electric blue cornflowers, *centaurea cyanus*, pink and white corncockle, *agrostemma githago* and drifts of pale pink and white *antirrhinum*.



Fragrance is key. 'I use lots of herbs,' she says, pointing out the raised bed packed with large pots of mint. 'Peppermint, eau de cologne, lavender and even chocolate mint' are combined with marjoram, borage and tall fennel. 'Herbs are fabulous in bouquets as they add another dimension and texture,' she adds.

The season starts with narcissus and is followed by tulips. 'It's challenging but huge fun to produce something that looks good in the winter; combining lichen, bare branches, hazel and willow catkins, coloured stems with buds and a few narcissus or tulips from the greenhouse.'

The abundance of perennials that flourish in the moist, compost-enriched soil allows Tricia to combine perennials and annuals to striking effect. In particular, she raids her beds for agapanthus, sea holly eryngium alpina, alstroemeria, echinops, acid yellow alchemilla mollis, nepeta, salvia and achillea 'the Pearl'.

'I now view my garden in a whole different way, I use the whole space as a cutting garden.'

**Above:** A woodland walk in the policies.  
**Left:** Gates framing the Douglas firs outside the walled garden.



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