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# Kitchen Garden

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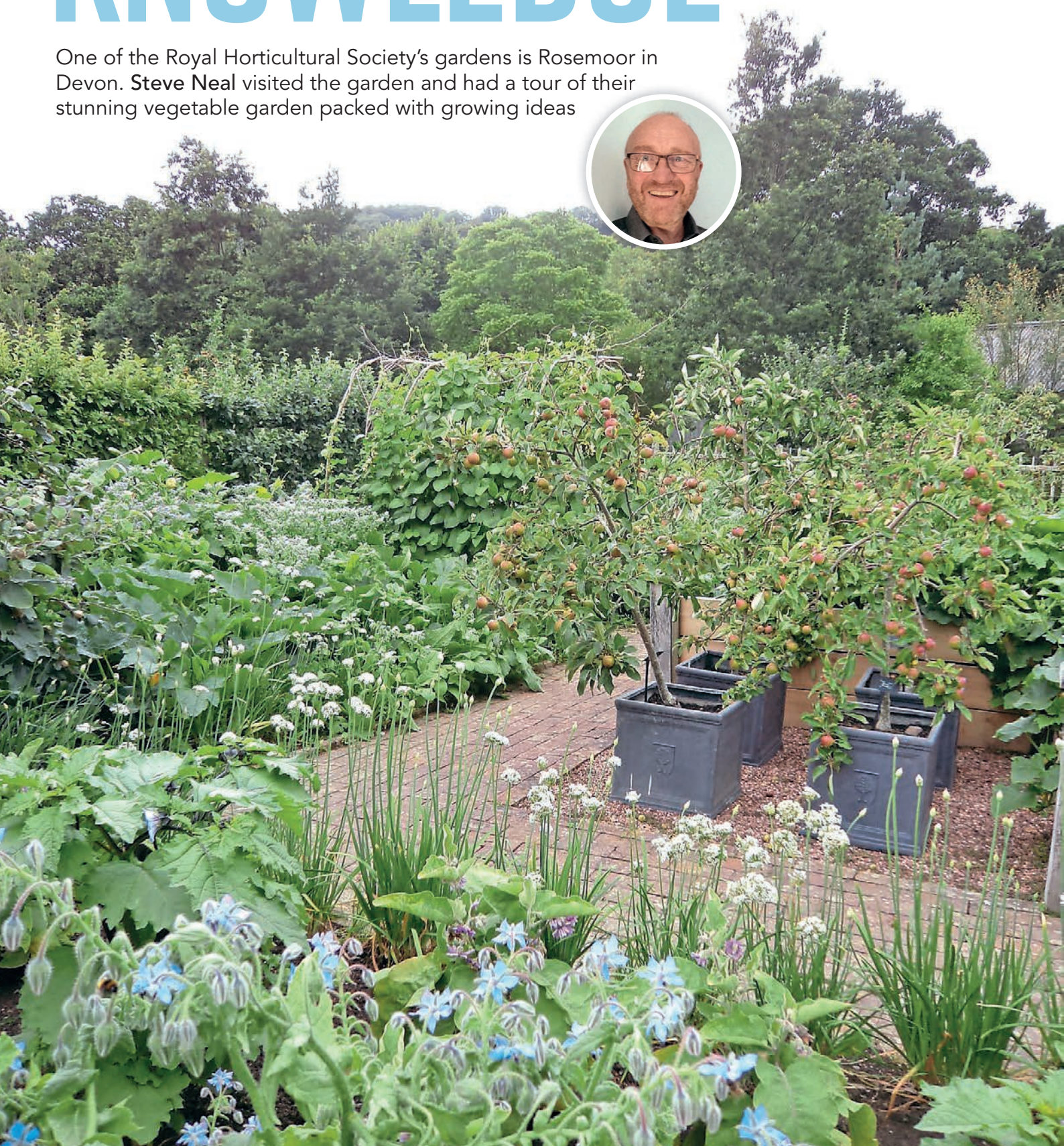
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GET GROWING

# *GARDEN OF* **KNOWLEDGE**

One of the Royal Horticultural Society's gardens is Rosemoor in Devon. **Steve Neal** visited the garden and had a tour of their stunning vegetable garden packed with growing ideas







**ABOVE:** Brassicas growing well. Behind these is an arch of squashes

I'm in deepest Devon at Rosemoor, the smallest of the RHS gardens. It's set in a valley and the terraces of Great Torrington look over us from the hill. Pete Adams, head of edibles, is showing me around the fruit and vegetables grown by his team. While every garden has a purpose, it's only the great gardens that have clear and beneficial purposes.

Pete is to the point, very precise about what the fruit and vegetable section is about. On the one hand, there is the decorative function, to look good for the visitors who regularly seek out the place. And it is also there to educate and inform. These two purposes inform gardening practice which in turn informs how the gardens look to the visitors.

The fruit and vegetable section is a real head-turner, and you never quite know where to look as you are continually distracted by something else. The beds are fringed by the garlic chives, their hard, white flowers picked out by the September sunshine. Other beds are bordered by a row of step-over apples or you find at eye level an espalier of apples, the fruit reddening as it ripens. Then there are apples in containers: different varieties, different styles of growing.

As well as looking good, it's about demonstrating that there are many ways to cultivate apples. One of the points that Pete and the RHS are trying to get across is that, whatever the space, you can fit fruit into your garden. Do you like strawberries? Then there is a trial of ever-bearing varieties in hanging baskets. It gets the visitors thinking about the possibilities in their own gardens.

If a visitor has a question then there is always a gardener around to provide an answer. Part of a gardener's brief at RHS Rosemoor is to interact with the public. If you like to garden undisturbed and lose yourself, then a job at Rosemoor wouldn't suit you. There are three full-time members of the team and eight volunteers who not only keep the place looking good but who also respond to visitor questions.

Information is also provided via an occasional information board, discreetly placed, which doesn't overtly interfere with the visual impact of the garden.

There is an impressive bed of Savoy cabbage 'Tundra' out in the open. Thinking of the ravages of the cabbage white butterfly on my own plot, I ask Pete why his cabbage isn't netted. He says he wants it to look good for the visitors and then goes on to explain how he deals with the pests. (See Pete's top tips, next page.) ➤

## THE KITCHEN GARDENERS

### PETE ADAMS

Head of edibles at Rosemoor, pictured against a 'Kidd's Orange' in the orchard. Gardening has always been part of his life. When he moved to the West Country with his family from Bradford at the age of 12, he started his own garden and sold the produce from the side of the road. He studied a BSc in Horticulture at Duchy College and then worked at Tresco Valley garden.

**Favourite apple:** 'Discovery'.



### MIRIAM PETRYS

One of the horticulturalists at the garden. Started out as a volunteer at Rosemoor and moved on from there. Working with the team at Rosemoor is "like being a member of the family", she said.

**Favourite apple:** 'Laxton's Epicure'.



### ALEX PAINES

Started work in a garden centre and found that he wanted to grow as well as sell plants. He enjoys the variety of his two-year apprenticeship at Rosemoor.

**Favourite apple:** 'Lord Lambourne'.



### ROSIE TREHARNE

Rosie started out with a two-year foundation course at Cannington and then moved on to a level 3 at Hestercombe garden. "Working at Rosemoor is not just a job but a lifestyle choice," she said.

**Favourite apple:** 'Spartan'.



**BELOW:** Squashes cascade over the picket fencing







## PETE'S TOP TIPS

### 1 PEST CONTROL

Keep on top: pre-empt things before they happen. Rosemoor is run on organic principles so Pete favours using Nemaslug nematodes to deal with slugs and he backs this up with organic pellets. Although the latter will be washed away by rain, you must get into a routine of reapplying them. For cabbage root fly he uses a biological control, which is not available to the home gardener. (However, there are other widely available biological products that treat root fly.)

For cabbage white caterpillars Pete uses a *Bacillus thuringiensis* spray. This is a biological insecticide, which paralyses the digestive system of the insect. He sprays the cabbages twice with this from underneath. It seems to do the trick.

### 2 LOG SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

A notebook at home is helpful or use your smartphone. Keep a list of the varieties that worked or didn't work and use this to inform your seed ordering in the winter.

### 3 'YOU GET OUT WHAT YOU PUT IN'

Pete favours double-digging the plot. Rosemoor has tight, clay soil and is in something of a frost pocket. He uses a four-year crop rotation. "I have to guarantee a display," he says.

### 4 USE YOUR POTS AND CONTAINERS

Blueberries in pots, strawberries in hanging baskets, 'Tumbling Toms' in containers.

### 5 CONSIDER HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE TO GARDEN

If you only have a small amount of time then adjust your ambitions accordingly. Do a bit at a time and do it well.



ABOVE: An array of lettuce varieties. They will help to supply the restaurant

## COLOURFUL LETTUCE

I ask Pete about his favourite area of the garden, and he picks a bed of lettuce. And it's some bed of lettuce, with a range of red and green shapes and styles, combining in a pleasing display. It must have been something like that the monks of medieval France were aiming for in their potagers. One of Pete's plans for next year is a knot garden of lettuce.

Part of you doesn't want to spoil the impact by picking a lettuce, but the garden has practical purpose. All of this produce is used: the lettuce is sold in the shop and along with other vegetables goes up to the Garden Kitchen restaurant on site, where the menu proudly tells you what has been grown at Rosemoor. In the course of a year, around £20,000-£30,000 of produce is supplied by the fruit and vegetable garden to the restaurant. The soft fruit is made into jam, which is sold in the RHS shop; the apples too, are juiced and sold.

Another aspect of Pete's work are the RHS veg trials at Rosemoor. This is where different varieties are tested out at the RHS gardens to see how they perform under different conditions. This can lead to the award of garden merit. This year parsnips, cherry tomatoes and dwarf runner beans have all been tried and tested. ➤







“Around  
£20,000-  
£30,000 of  
produce is supplied  
by the fruit and  
vegetable  
garden to the  
restaurant”

The beautifully tended fruit and vegetable garden wows thousands of visitors each year and encourages them to grow their own



## ORCHARD OF OLDS

There has been an orchard at Rosemoor for some years with popular good-tasting English apples such as ‘Kidd’s Orange’ and ‘Lord Lambourne’.

Last year this was complemented by a Devon apple orchard to safeguard heritage varieties. Since the 1960s, two-thirds of our nation’s orchards have been lost and many apple varieties have disappeared. This orchard will keep ancient Devon varieties alive for future generations.

The apple collection has been grafted on to robust root stock and planted out as whips – no more than about 40cm (16in) high.

This new orchard of rare and old varieties – eaters, cookers and cider apples – will be used in the restaurant, turned into Rosemoor cider and juice, or sold as bagged apples.

The names make fascinating reading: ‘Billy Down Pippin’, ‘Devon Pendragon’, ‘Johnny Voun’, ‘Devon Crimson Queen’, ‘Kirtan Fair’, ‘Pigs Nose’. It will be interesting to see what the different apples taste like as fresh fruit, cooked in pies or as cider, when the trees come to maturity.



ABOVE: Globe artichoke

LEFT: The veg gardens are interspersed with colourful flowers, such as sunflowers

RIGHT: Marigolds edge this bed







## HOW TO RUN AN ALLOTMENT

There is an allotment course at RHS Rosemoor. The idea behind this is for people to gain the skills and experience to make a success of their own allotments.

For the last few years Pete has been running the course at RHS Rosemoor. The course lasts from February until September and the students are given a plot, seeds, compost and a pair of boots. Pete runs sessions on planting, pricking out and growing on and the students have access to the polytunnels in the gardens.

It's been a great success with students from the age of 18 to 76 enjoying the experience. ■

A colourful and productive runner bean arch

## VISITING RHS ROSEMOOR

The garden is signposted from Great Torrington in Devon.

It is open all year round except Christmas Day.  
10am-5pm (Oct-Mar),  
10am-6pm (April-Sept)

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor>

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