

# Heralds of spring

MARGARET ARNOTT'S WOODLAND GLADE UNFURLS IMMACULATE  
SNOWDROPS TO LIFT FEBRUARY'S GLOOM

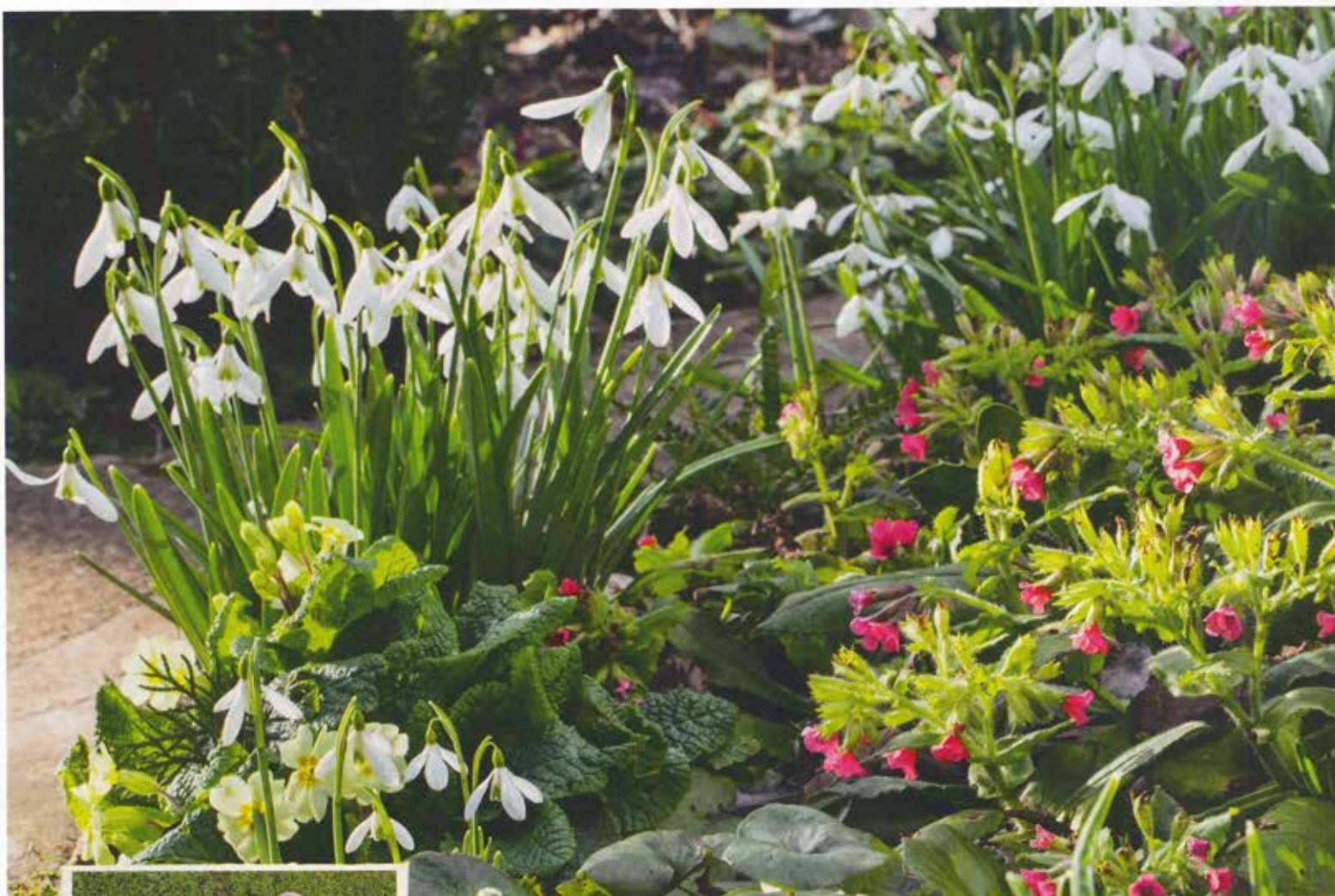


The delicate face of *Galanthus* 'Hill Poë', with its tightly packed rosette of beautifully marked inner petals, belies a tough character.



**Woodland path**  
Lining the walkway that snakes towards the house is a multi-stemmed amelanchier tree, right, and camellias on either side. Purple primroses add welcome pops of colour, while lacy ferns are coming up through snowdrops. »





### At home with...

**Owners** Margaret Arnott and partner Terry Bartholomew.

**House** A generously wide 1950s bungalow that has been extended, and the living and dining areas fitted with folding French doors, which means the garden can be seen from almost anywhere in the house.

**Garden** The one-third of an acre, rectangular plot is gently terraced upwards at the back for 40 metres. In winter, a small woodland glade in the heart of the garden shows off an array of rare and unusual snowdrops and other early flowerers.

*If you share a last name* with a notable snowdrop breeder, your mother is herself a snowdrop enthusiast and you grow up with them all around you, it is not surprising if you turn out to be a galanthophile yourself.

Margaret Arnott's mother, Helen, became interested in snowdrops when she learnt that a Scottish cleric named Sam Arnott had bred a tall, upright snowdrop with grey-green leaves and large scented flowers, and named it *Galanthus* 'S. Arnott' in the late-19th century. So Margaret grew up in Kent with a well-established fascination for snowdrops, and by the time she bought her house in Surrey in 1988 she owned quite a collection.

Already a keen gardener, Margaret recalls, 'I wanted a bungalow as it gave me a wider garden and when I stepped through the front door and realised I could see all the way along the length of the garden I knew this was the house for me.'

But she didn't have much spare time for gardening. Margaret and her equally keen gardening partner, Terry Bartholomew, who came to live with her a few years later, were cabin crew on *Concorde*. So both were flying off for days at a time and the garden had to be juggled in between their complex schedules.

However, Margaret had made a substantial start on the garden before Terry arrived to help. 'I knew I wanted a background of evergreen to give me some colour in the winter, so when I first began the garden I planted a different evergreen shrub every two metres to give me a tapestry of off-season interest,' she says. 'It's worked well. I removed a number of old shrubs but kept a monkey puzzle tree, a holly and an amelanchier.'

Margaret's skill lies in combining patience with persistence. 'I'd always wanted a box parterre and it was one of the first »

### Colour combinations

Long-stemmed 'Magnet' snowdrops, left, sway in the breeze, with smaller *Galanthus* 'Bitton' close by, and red pulmonarias and yellow primroses bringing a dash of colour.

### The big pool

Golden acorus grass grows at the water's edge, while the red stems of *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku', hellebores, ferns and the yellow alpine *Hacquetia epipactis* soften the edges of the path.

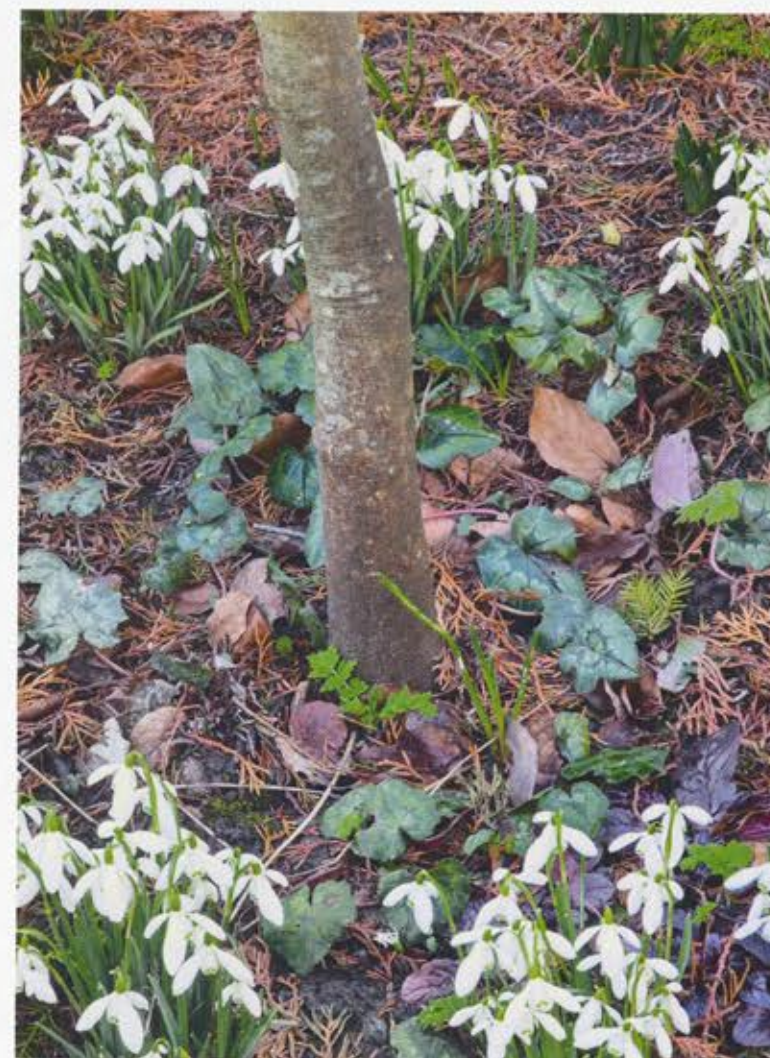
Surrey garden

*What makes this garden so special...  
Each season introduces its own glorious  
display of plants'*





Snowdrops aren't necessarily pure white: *Galanthus plicatus* 'Wendy's Gold' is an unusual yellow variety.



### Modern Country Classic

## Swathes of snowdrops

Discover the secrets behind an early season showcase.

### Need to know...

- Mulch in autumn to promote early growth and in summer to cover up the corms after leaves have died down. Add manure when planting.
- Choose successive plants carefully so they can emerge after the snowdrops are finished and provide a summer show.
- Buy snowdrops from reputable suppliers, such as Foxgrove Plants, 01635 40554, foxgroveplants.co.uk.
- Plant herbaceous trees so there is an open canopy in early spring.

### Circling round

Margaret plants ordinary snowdrops, *Galanthus nivalis*, around trees and the stems of shrubs.

### Winter garden

The spiky-leaved ricinus, bottom left, is actually a copper water fountain by Humphrey Bowden, in the pond near the greenhouse.

things we created at the top end of the garden, copying the style from one we'd seen at Hampton Court Palace.'

It is now complete with bold box balls and Terry's tall handmade metal obelisks to give extra vertical lift. But all the box for the parterre was grown from one bought box ball plant, from which, over the next eight years, cuttings were taken to grow on to fill the whole parterre.

The garden soil is sandy over a base layer of clay, and in earlier centuries the area was known for its brickworks. When the couple were digging out their two pools they uncovered many examples of the local Oxshott brick, made from a red clay, which Margaret pressed into use for paths and edging.

Having cleared the overgrown area between the holly and the amelanchier in the centre of the garden, Margaret and Terry realised they had created the perfect setting for a winter woodland glade. An *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku' is a recent addition, but fits in well with its elegant red stems and late leaf arrival. Growing with, and through, the snowdrops are a mix of camellias, pulmonarias, primroses, ferns, hellebores and the little yellow alpine flower *Hacquetia epipactis*.

Margaret planted her original snowdrops close to the edges of the paths that Terry had mapped out and built, and made a plan so she knows where and what each clump is. 'It sounds a bit precious,' she says, 'but snowdrop bulb cultivars are quite expensive – starting at about £8 each and as they die back in summer it is crucial to know where they are so you don't dig them up when you are weeding round the next layer of foliage that comes up through in summer.' It's a wise move as snowdrop bulbs with unusual markings now fetch incredible prices (up >>

What we love most about this garden...

'It's wonderful to be able to see and enjoy the garden from any part of the house'





### On our doorstep...

**Visit...** 'Painshill (01932 868113, painshill.co.uk), Cobham, an 18th-century landscaped garden with a lake, follies and a grotto that is wonderful all year round.'

**Shop at...** 'Garsons (01372 464389, garsons.co.uk), Esher, which has everything you need for the garden in one place, plus a farm shop, pick-your-own and a lovely restaurant.'

**Go for a meal at...** 'La Capanna (01932 862121, lacapanna.co.uk), Cobham - it is our favourite restaurant with delicious Italian food and a wonderful atmosphere.'

to a record £725 for one bulb). She may not know exactly how many named snowdrops she has as they do multiply, but she knows what they are called and where they are. 'I buy many of my snowdrops from National Gardens Scheme gardens - the multi-petalled 'Blewbury Tart' was one, but specialist nurseries are also a good source.'

'My all-time favourite snowdrop is the elvish 'Trym' with its little pixie-hat shape. I bought it from Foxgrove Plants in Newbury. I wanted one so badly and they had none in stock, so they went out and dug one out for me. I was delighted.'

Next on the favourite list would be 'Diggory' with its crumpled 'seersucker' petals, and coming a very close third is the 'Walrus' with long drooping moustache-style petals.

Margaret and Terry have now retired and are able to spend a large amount of time in their garden. Terry always has a project on the go - and Margaret makes sure the garden is immaculate at all times because they receive a number of group visits in addition to their NGS open day - and she is much in demand to give gardening talks.

'Frankly, I don't know how we ever managed to find the time to go to work before - the garden now takes up all our time.' Of course, if they are not in their own garden, their favourite occupation is visiting others. 'It is a whole way of life,' they both say, adding 'and we love it.'

📞 **Heathside, Cobham, Surrey opens by appointment, and for the National Gardens Scheme (ngs.org.uk). Margaret is available to give garden talks and also organises group tours for the NGS. Email: m.a.arnott@btinternet.com.**

### Mixed blessings

Planting different snowdrops together creates a stunning effect, but Margaret needs a detailed plan to keep track of them all. The neighbours of yellow 'Wendy's Gold', left, include 'Mrs MacNamara', 'Merlin', 'Trym', 'Magnet', 'James Backhouse' and 'Bitton' snowdrops.



### Margaret's snowdrops and companions

- 1 *Galanthus nivalis* f. *pleniflorus* 'Walrus' is barely recognisable as a snowdrop.
- 2 Fern *Polystichum polyblepharum* is perfect for a woodland glade.
- 3 *Galanthus plicatus* 'Trym' has a delightful fairytale 'elf's-hat' shape.
- 4 Creamy *Primula vulgaris* provides a subtle contrast to other white plants.
- 5 *Helleborus niger* (Christmas rose) is a beautiful early flowerer.
- 6 Black *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens' lets pale blooms stand out.
- 7 The petals of *Galanthus plicatus* 'Diggory' have a crinkled charm.
- 8 *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku' is chosen for its colourful stems.