

In brief

What Romantic garden surrounding a former farm worker's cottage, planted with roses and thousands of spring-flowering bulbs.

Points of interest Huge selection of tulip cultivars, box parterre, traditional weatherboard and black-tarred barn, typical of the region.

Where On the former island of Walcheren in the southwestern province of Zeeland, the Netherlands.

Size 1,000 square metres.

Soil Heavy clay.

Climate Temperate maritime.

Hardiness rating USDA 10a.

Alongside a path made from reclaimed bricks, Hetty has planted a pretty mix of pink and purple tulips, including 'Flaming Purissima', 'Exotic Emperor', 'Negrita', 'Judith Leyster' and 'Rosalie'.

Electric dreams

Bulbs are Hetty van Baalen's passion, and in spring the gardens surrounding her Dutch cottage light up with thousands of tulips, narcissi and hyacinths in a rich, eclectic mix of vibrant colour.

WORDS SIMONE VAN HEININGEN PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS

If you think you need 100, buy 200," is Hetty van Baalen's advice when it comes to bulbs. "You really need big, big numbers if you want them to have an impact." Proving her point, she leads me to five old dustbins, planted up with *Tulipa clusiana* 'Cynthia', *Bellis perennis* and *Calamagrostis brachytricha*. "You're looking at 100 Cynthias," she says. "And don't bother taking any bulbs out. Not everything will come back but you may be surprised. Among my white *Tulipa* 'Hakuun' there is this one *Tulipa* 'Apeldoorn' – the strongest red tulip – that I put in 30 years ago. I don't have the heart to get rid of it. I simply cut the flower and put it in a vase."

This old friend is one of thousands Hetty has planted over the years. She and her husband, Toon de Ruiter, bought their cottage in 1980 when the garden was nothing but bare soil. "As a child, I'd visit my grandfather's beautiful garden," remembers Hetty. "And I would always think, one day, when I grow up..." Fulfilling her dream on this strip of heavy clay, which cuts through the mainly sandy soil of coastal Zeeland, took some doing. "Those first years, I would turn all of the soil just before winter, wait until the frost had passed and then add manure and sand."

The daughter of a vegetable and flower grower, Hetty takes a pragmatic approach to gardening. "I'll gladly go on holiday and leave the garden to its own devices," she says. "Obviously, I deadhead the tulips, but I simply let the foliage die off. I don't like things too neat; if my *Akebia quinata* wants to spread out over the soil as well as climb up the pergola, so be it." That said, Hetty has decided to prune the *Prunus lusitanica* 'Myrtifolia' into tidy spheres. Hetty loves topiary – "I go for harmony not symmetry" – but in common with many Dutch gardeners, her box fell prey to *Cylindrocladium buxicola* blight. So, the box parterre filled with green-striped *Tulipa* 'Exotic Emperor', pure-white *Tulipa* 'Hakuun' and sweet-smelling *Narcissus* 'Thalia', will soon be a thing of the past. "But when a door closes, a window opens," says Hetty, who is planning a French-style 'potager' in its place. Although Hetty is open to change, the front garden is always planted up with

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Hetty's witty box parterre, here filled with a selection of white tulips – 'Exotic Emperor', 'Purissima' and 'Hakuun' – has now, sadly, fallen prey to box blight and will soon be replaced by a French-style potager garden.



Hetty made the obelisk and painted it bright blue to match the contemporary seat by designer Marleen Booy.

▷ bulbs in shades of red and yellow, with for instance *Tulipa* 'Flaming Parrot' and *T.* 'Mickey Mouse' standing out against the white-fronted cottage and the old, black barn.

In summer, the fiery colour scheme at the front gives way to romantic pastels, with *Rosa* Windrush (= 'Ausrush'), *Geranium pratense* 'Mrs Kendall Clark', *Geranium* 'Orion' and *Digitalis purpurea* 'Alba'.

Near the street an oyster-shell path – a reference to a local delicacy – leads around the house. A raised bed along this path is home to a *Pyrus communis* 'Doyenné du Comice', underplanted with cream and purple tulips. Close to the road, these are the first to fall prey to the deer that come into the village. "Given the chance, they'll eat every tulip in the garden," says Hetty. "I do get up at night to check up on them. Stressful times." The deer also like Hetty's other passion – roses.

Arches surrounding the parterre are covered in *Rosa* 'Blush Noisette', *R.* 'Madame Alfred Carrière', *R. Jasmina* (= 'Korcentex'), *R.* 'Constance Spry' and *R.* 'Félicité Perpétue'. Along the wooden fence – painted black in

keeping with the barn – are *R.* 'Fantin-Latour', *R.* 'Blanchefleur' and *R.* 'Tapis Volant', which may flower on into December. In spring, however, seating areas come alive with bulb arrangements in every shape and size. From terracotta pots filled with *Hyacinthus orientalis*, *Tulipa* 'Vincent van Gogh' and *T.* 'Ballerina', to baskets filled with *Gaultheria procumbens* and *Muscari armeniacum* 'Blue Spike'. Buckets, dustbins – even her mum's old salt pot – are put to use. "I do like my stuff," admits Hetty. Stuff it may be, but this is such stuff as dreams are made on. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

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Follow Hetty's blog – in English – at dutch-garden-stories.blogspot.nl

Open 24-25 April and 19-20 June, 10am-5pm (€2.50). Groups welcome by appointment from mid April until the end of June (€3.50).

4 bulb combinations

1 Cream of the crop

In her bulb baskets Hetty has planted the eye-catching, deep-pink *Tulipa* 'Abigail', a peony-flowered tulip with double rows of velvety petals, alongside white *Narcissus* 'Thalia' and the blue and pink forget-me-nots. Baskets such as these were traditionally used to sell bulbs at auction and these ones belonged to Hetty's grandfather. In the foreground is a mix of the raspberry-and-cream streaked, *T.* 'Flaming Purissima', *T.* 'Negrita' and *T.* 'Rosalie'.

2 Jewels in the crown

Here a bold combination of tulips – the fiery *T.* 'Orange Surprise', the romantic white *T.* 'Casablanca' and two purple tulips 'Blue Diamond' and 'Ballade' – are softened by forget-me-nots and the fragrant and self-seeding *Erysimum* 'Progress'. In late spring the tulips in this mix will give way to the orange *T.* 'Prinses Irene' and the delicately striped, greeny yellow *T.* 'Yellow Springgreen'.

3 Warm tones

Yellow and red tulips are a classic colour combination in many Dutch gardens. In borders to the left and right of a pair of *Syringa vulgaris* that frame her front door, Hetty has planted a mix of *T.* 'Striped Bellona', *T.* 'Mickey Mouse', *T.* 'Westpoint' and *T.* 'Ile de France' – their spiky foliage softened by forget-me-nots and bright-green euphorbia.

4 Cool sophistication

In these brick-edged raised beds, which line either side of an oyster-shell path, the colour palette is more muted. Here a host of creamy-white *T.* 'Pays Bas' are dotted with the brownish-purple *T.* 'Fontainebleau' and the almost black *T.* 'Continental', which flowers in April and is a good, early alternative to the classic *T.* 'Queen of Night'. They provide a subtle backdrop for the *Pyrus communis* 'Doyenné du Comice', a pear tree with extremely sweet and juicy fruit.

