

Lettuces and other salad crops growing in Corten steel raised beds, in front of a border of common oats at Jordans Mill's new food garden.

Cereal THRILLER

A new garden at Jordans Mill in Bedfordshire cleverly melds agriculture and horticulture in a high-concept space

PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS | WORDS STEPHANIE MAHON

The new garden at Jordans Mill in Bedfordshire might confound some people's expectations of what that word means. At first glance, there are ornamental and edible plants growing in stylish arrangements, sure; nice views of the River Ivel, which runs past the site; paths to wander and benches to rest on. But look again, and you will see arable crops growing pride of place; a layout resembling small fields; and around the edges, and dotted here and there in the wildflower margins, hints of a deeper meaning at work.

Still a working mill, though no longer producing any of the family's famous cereals, the ►

design: food garden

site is now an educational attraction. The client wanted to make the old yard into a food garden that would look good and provide some home-grown produce for the Riverside Café, situated in the oak-framed 'Mill Store' building.

The daring new half-acre garden that sprang up in 2013 was designed by Julie Toll and Ian Kitson, who teamed up on the project to create a thoughtful concept for the site. Both have experience in delivering diverse projects, and sometimes combine forces. 'I had worked for the Jordans before, on the Wave Garden at Pensthorpe,' Julie explains. 'On this project, they already had a design from someone else, but decided they preferred the one we had done.'

'If it was just a food-producing garden, it would be quite dull for a lot of the year,' says Ian, 'so we needed to give it year-round interest. And any place you are showing off eight or 10 things, you have to divide it up, so we decided to base the layout on field patterns. This gives it a strong connection to the countryside, which is what Jordans is all about.'

The real genius of the design, however, is the striking use of field crops like rye, spelt, wheat and oats up against typical garden staples like salads and even ornamental plants such as *Stipa gigantea*. There is a contemporary touch from the raised beds made from rust-coloured metal. 'Corten steel is a very stable form of metal and doesn't leach,' Julie explains. 'I've got them in my own garden, and often use them in other projects. They do heat up quite quickly and dry out a little, so when you are watering them, you just have to water around the rim more. They have an elegance as they are not clunky, and you get maximum growing space.'

The garden also includes areas of meadow and an orchard, as well as a soft fruit section where the head gardener grows lots of raspberries, blackberries, tayberries, strawberries, gooseberries, blackcurrants and loganberries;

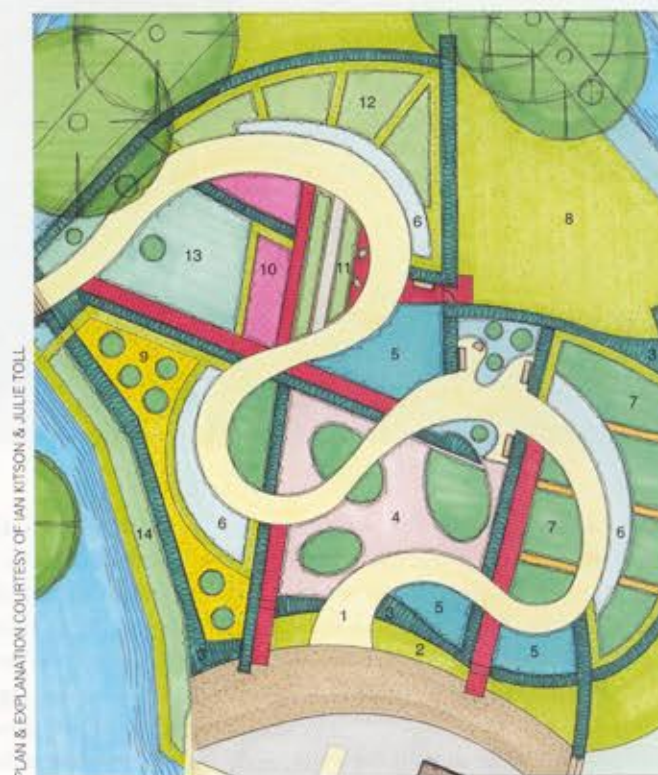
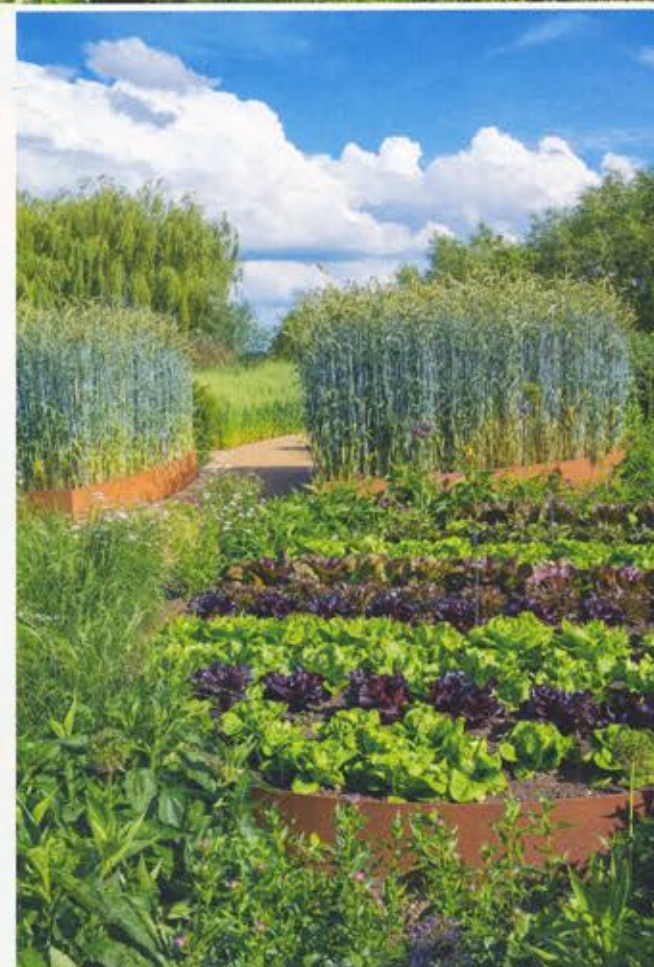
representing the fruit that goes into a box of Jordans muesli.

As idyllic and interesting as the site is now, the journey to get here was fraught with difficulties. When Ian and Julie began work, the garden area was mostly concrete, built over a site contaminated with old farming fuel and chemicals, which had to be managed.

The solution? 'You are essentially now looking at a roof garden,' says Ian. 'A huge impermeable

ABOVE Lettuce, garlic, fennel, herbs, ornamental grasses and companion plants like marigolds grow in beds in the wider garden. **BELOW LEFT** The soft fruit garden and salad beds are in front of the Riverside Café.

RIGHT Raised beds of field rye give height on either side of the path.



PLAN & EXPLANATION COURTESY OF IAN KITSON & JULIE TOLL

THE MILL GARDEN BY NUMBERS

- 1) The Winding Path** The inspiration for this path was the shape of the River Ivel meandering through the countryside.
- 2) Verges** Flowers in verges provide food for insects, which pollinate the crops. These verges include early flowering bulbs.
- 3) Hedging** The Mill Garden layout was inspired by the patterns of hedging in the countryside.
- 4) Arable crops and perennial meadows** The raised island beds contain spelt, legumes, rye and brassicas grown in rotation. They are surrounded by perennial meadow planting.
- 5) Field Crops** In these areas, onions and leeks are grown in a three-year rotation with oats and potatoes.
- 6) Field Margins** The Mill Garden has three areas that represent what happens on a Conservation Grade farm.
- 7) The Norfolk Four Course System** Arable crops such as wheat, barley, clover and root vegetables are grown here on a four-year rotation.
- 8) Flower-rich meadows** Parts of these meadows are planted with species to provide winter food for birds.
- 9) The orchard** A selection of fruit trees set in an annual flower meadow.
- 10) Soft fruit** Berry-producing fruits including strawberries, raspberries and blackcurrants.
- 11) Salad beds** This area shows how you can grow your own salad crops, with different salad leaf crops grown here throughout the year in raised containers.
- 12) The allotment garden** This area demonstrates how you can grow your own and rotate your food crops.
- 13) The uncultivated corner** A mix of plants with a more relaxed and unmanaged character.
- 14) River-edge planting** This edge is below the flood plain so all plants chosen for this area can tolerate localised flooding.

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membrane was laid over the site, with various drainage systems around the edge, and then a drainage layer over that. Then we had to bring all the soil in. The whole site is slightly mounded to get the soil depth. It was quite a big job in terms of finding a solution that we felt would stand up.'

Both designers are pleased with the result, and hope it communicates something more than just edible goodies to those who visit. 'On a number of levels, it works and holds together really well,' says Ian. 'It was important for us to produce something thoughtful - there are a lot of food-producing gardens and renovated Victorian

walled gardens out there, but this one blurs the boundaries. We've tried to respect food growing as something much more than that without the whole garden feeling like a veg plot.'

'It's lovely to be able to create something in a public space,' agrees Julie. 'We are hoping it might inspire other gardeners to think about how they design their own plots.'

Jordans Mill, Holme Mills, Langford Road, Broom, Bedfordshire SG18 9JY. Tel: +44 (0)1767 603940. jordansmill.com For more information on designers Ian Kitson and Julie Toll, go to www.iankitson.com and www.julietoll.co.uk

ABOVE LEFT *Scabiosa* 'Butterfly Blue' and *Sesleria autumnalis* offer a lovely scene from the wooden Chico chairs from Wales & Wales.

ABOVE RIGHT In a more formal area, a pear tree is underplanted with *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote' edged with *Teucrium x lucidrys*.



GROWING FOR GOOD

More than 10% of the garden is managed for wildlife, including wildflower meadows (ox-eye daisies and red campion, left), verges and rows of native field hedging. Ian and Julie also planted stylised field margins along the beds and boundaries, using cultivated plants (*calendula* and *amaranthus*, below left) as well as wild and native types.

This follows a farming scheme called Conservation Grade, which aims to recreate lost habitats in the countryside, and increase farmland wildlife. The idea is to promote plants for pollen, seeds for birds, cover for small mammals and increased plant diversity. The farmers who supply Jordans with the cereals that go into its products are advocates of this scheme. Another element the garden has adopted from farming is crop rotation.

As well as the agricultural elements, the garden is also referencing the historical tradition of proud market gardeners in Bedfordshire. ♦