

PRIVATE VIEW

PHOTOGRAPHS MARIANNE MAJERUS | WORDS STEPHANIE MAHON

Bunny Guinness's half-acre garden has morphed from family space to self-sufficiency plot over the years, but stayed full of ingenious ideas and surprisingly low maintenance



Bunny Guinness and her husband moved to Sibberton Lodge in Cambridgeshire 30 years ago. The landscape architect, well known for her writing in *The Telegraph* and her appearances on Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*, says there was nothing in the way of a garden on the site when they arrived. 'The house was built in the 13th century and formed part of a tenant farm,' she explains. 'We ended up with half an acre of garden, not including the woodland and meadows.' ►



▼ WALLED WONDER

This shallow pool runs the length of the walled garden. Pleached hornbeam were planted around it for privacy, to block the house next door from overlooking. 'I put in the false gate at the bottom for views out to the meadow - there is no access there,' says Bunny.

Bunny began by planting trees and starting hedges from cuttings, and over the years has created different areas around the house and beyond, from a front courtyard and walled garden to a veg garden, utility area and orchard.

Things have changed over the years as the family has grown and changed. 'You change your focus a bit,' Bunny explains. 'When we started out we had no children; then they came along, and we created dedicated spaces in the garden for them. Now, the children are mainly gone, and it is mostly about self-sufficiency these days.'

One of the most recent changes was the creation of the kitchen prep area (*see previous page*), which was previously a field, and 'the sheep would come right up to the building, and watch the TV through the window!' says Bunny. As well as the prep area there is room for a Kadai firebowl and two comfy rattan sofas, which dog Gracie Jones enjoys snoozing on.

'I like the garden to be really usable,' she says, 'so there are

tables and chairs in all the spaces.' Tom Hitchcock from Gedding Mill made the furniture to Bunny's design, in steel with an acid-etched galvanised finish, which is maintenance free.

When she began, Bunny did plan out the whole garden into areas, but she has also tweaked over time. 'The main thing was to get it to flow right, so all the garden spaces link and you are aware of them from the house,' she says. 'The house and garden should interact with each other.' In fact, Bunny believes in this principle so much that while building a kitchen extension, she made sure the windows were put in low enough that when sitting at the kitchen table, the garden is in full view. 'I like to see the changes of the seasons,' she explains, 'one landscape in summer and another in winter.'

Another important element of the garden for her was that once it was laid out and planted, that it be low maintenance. 'I've got to be able to manage it with minimal time, because I only have one day a week. My daughter helps, but it is tight'



'All the garden spaces link and you are aware of them from the house'



▲ WELL STONE ME

Stone-look balls are a motif repeated throughout the garden, as bench feet like this and as decorative elements. 'I designed this bench for a TV programme years ago, out of stone. These balls are actually concrete, but my friend colours them with stone dust to look like stone.' It is surrounded by cephalaria, phlox and *Acanthus mollis*.

▼ HOLDING COURT

The front courtyard is enclosed with a yew hedge and designed into a cruciform shape with box hedging. Quince trees sit at each corner and the beds have obelisks covered in roses such as 'Jacques Cartier'. 'I favour roses - David Austin is my uncle - but my poor soil is a problem for them,' says Bunny.



▲ PLAYING AROUND

The courtyard used to be laid to grass, and was like an outdoor playpen, great for keeping an eye on the kids - 'I could see them from my office,' Bunny says. 'When money permitted, we paved it.' The unpaved squares are planted with *Thymus serpyllum* 'Minimus' and the gravel has blobs of *Euphorbia myrsinites*. ►

EVERGREEN INTEREST



BOTTOMLESS POTS

These enormous Portuguese laurel have been planted in baseless pots. 'They have got so large, I have to chainsaw them down and make them into balls,' Bunny explains. 'I like mucking around with topiary.'



CLOUDS OF GREEN

Cloud-pruned box balls flank a thin stone sett path that leads into the woods. It was a dwarf hedge on one of Bunny's RHS Chelsea show gardens a few years ago. She brought it home, planted it and reclipped like this.



TAKE SHELTER

'There were no trees here when we arrived, and it was a very windy site,' says Bunny. 'I planted a shelterbelt in the first week as a screen, then these yew hedges from cuttings. I shaped off the corners recently, to open up the view into the veg garden.'



▲ VEG HEAVEN

The veg garden cloches are also from an RHS Chelsea show garden, and made at Gedding Mill. The wooden fruit cage at the back was home-made for raspberries. Espaliered apple trees grow in baseless pots inside wicker edging, inside doughnuts of box hedging. 'I change what I grow all the time, always different things, but rely on watercress, spinach, cut-and-come-again lettuce, sprouts, leeks, tomatoes and garlic. We are fairly heavily self-sufficient.'



▲ CHOP, CHOP

Bunny transformed part of a field into this outdoor lounge and kitchen with chopping area, barbecue and sink along the wall. 'It's great as we eat outside quite a lot,' she says. *Rosa 'Phyllis Bide'* grows on the wall, while pots of pelargoniums adorn the worktop.

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▼ WOMAN AT WORK

This greenhouse is one of two in Bunny's utility area at bottom of the old orchard. It is home-made from reclaimed windows, and cost about £1,000. 'I couldn't manage without it,' she says. 'It's invaluable in this small working garden, where I do lot of cuttings and sowing.'



▼ RAISE ME UP

Bunny often experiments with raised beds. The bottom ones here are 12 years old, made from split woven hazel with cedar coping. The top layer, which is new, is woven split sweet chestnut, with oak ones elsewhere. Cecil the cow looks on - Bunny also keeps pigs and chickens.



DESIGNER PROFILE

BUNNY GUINNESS is a landscape architect trained in horticulture who set up her own practice in 1986. She also works as a gardening writer, author and broadcaster. Bunny has designed nine show gardens including several at RHS Chelsea, winning six gold medals. She works up and down the country on diverse projects for both private and commercial clients. Bunny's latest book, *Highgrove: A Garden Celebrated* with HRH The Prince of Wales on his home garden in Gloucestershire is on sale now (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, £35). www.bunnyguinness.com

