

Perfect symmetry

At first glance the garden of Anky and Arnout Dwarfhuis appears the epitome of Dutch symmetry, but hidden behind its formal hedges lies a playful mix of styles borne of many different influences

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In brief

What Formally laid out private garden with loose planting.

Points of interest Series of traditional Dutch garden rooms with lots of topiary. There's also an orchard, featuring several old Dutch fruit cultivars.

Where Zwolle in Friesland, the Netherlands.

Size 3,000 square metres.

Soil Sandy and free draining.

Climate Cold winters but sheltered from wind.

At one time this area next to the house was a driveway. Now a circular arrangement of box forms the hub of the garden from where a long lawn leads to the orchard and brick paths radiate in all directions.

Art: change colour to wine red?

Like most old tricks, dividing a garden into different rooms has endured because it works

In 1978 Anky Dwarshuis was walking her dog in the park just outside the small Dutch town of Zwolle. Through the feathered trunks of the young trees she spotted a very handsome 19th-century farmhouse and decided that she wanted to live there. Having broken this news to her husband Arnout, that is exactly what they did and now, 35 years later, they are still there.

When the couple arrived, their first priority was the house. The garden, meanwhile was a chaotic wilderness of nettles and weeds with some good trees – notably two large walnuts and an orchard of venerable fruit trees. From these rather unpromising beginnings Anky and Arnout have built a very fine garden. One that is influenced by various gardens from all over Europe – “I have visited everywhere,” says Anky, “starting with Sissinghurst and Hidcote, looking for inspiration” – but one that still maintains a strong individuality and a very strong Dutchness. This is no pastiche of styles but a garden with a firm view of its own and some very strong opinions.

As a design it breaks no new ground by using the old trick of dividing the garden into different rooms. An old trick it may be but, like most old tricks, it has endured so long is because it works.

The first room is centred on a pollarded horse chestnut tree surrounded by epimediums, ferns, flapping bergenias and great tables of tonsured yew. This, and all the other rooms that follow, have really good hard landscaping – wide brick paths and well laid out steps and level changes. The credit for all that belongs to Arnout, everything within those boundaries is to the credit of Anky – “My husband is not a gardener!” is almost the first thing she tells me after I arrive.

If that room, with its table and chairs to take advantage of the last rays of evening sun, was a sort of small sitting room, the next one is much more of a grand hallway. A twirl ▶



The formality of the herb garden is offset by quirky touches, such as the topiary peacock, which looks as though it has nestled itself into the border.



Anky's wonderful cutting garden is overflowing with a colourful mix of cosmos, *Verbena bonariensis* and masses of dahlias.



In this joyously informal long garden to the left of the long lawn, a colourful mix of flowers for cutting mingle with edible delights such as artichokes and rhubarb.



Low-growing epimediums, ferns and bergenias growing beneath the shade of a pollarded horse chestnut tree create a textural carpet of foliage for this first room.

Art: change colour to wine red?



Using hedges

The Dutch do good hedges and that is proved in this garden. Anky has hedges of beech, yew, hawthorn and box with which she has divided what is essentially a pretty flat site. Sometimes the hedges are used in layers, sometimes clipped into different shapes: there are chickens and a peacock by the greenhouse and round pyramids and informal globes in other places. Topiary is nothing new in gardens (it was invented by the Romans) but will never go out of fashion because it works so well on three levels. Firstly as skeletal mass to link with the house and surroundings, secondly to give different textures and heights and finally as the perfect foil for sprightly planting schemes. In this garden Anky has used all three possibilities to great effect.

▷ of clipped box flanked by beech walls echoes the slightly severe formal façade of the house. “The symmetry is very important to the garden,” explains Anky. “Everything lines up with the front of the house.”

The most fortuitous manifestation of this is the gnarly old apple tree that just happens to be exactly in line with the door: thank goodness for the old farmer who planted it, as it makes a perfect focal point for the two long borders, which are looking fabulous at this time of year. It is in these borders that show the twinkle in the eye of this garden. *Molinia*, *Scutellaria*, *Persicaria*, the purest *Actaea matsumurae* ‘White Pearl’ and *Verbena bonariensis* – all those things that make the late summer so special – wave and sparkle in great contrast to the severity of the surrounding hedges and edges.

A gap in the borders leads to a charming greenhouse and herb garden and then on into the Italian Garden. “I called it that because of the putti,” says Anky pointing out two stone cherubs among the topiary and quince trees. On the other side is another enclosed garden,

this one with a clipped caterpillar of rounded box that leads off towards the fields and the wonderfully named lake, De Wiyde Aa (Friesland is not short of water), via a very full cutting garden billowing with dahlias, cosmos and nasturtiums.

Beyond the borders is the orchard, which is where Arnout (the husband who is “not a gardener”) comes into his own. When they arrived there were a few trees to which he has added many. “They may be cultivars you do not know,” he says. “They are mostly old Dutch fruit trees, such as the apple ‘Zoete Ermgaard’ or the pear ‘Noord Hollandse Suikerpeer.’” His eyes light up when talking about fruit giving you a glimpse of the same enthusiasm and passion that Anky displays when describing the rest of the garden.

The park where this journey began is still there but no longer visible from the house as the young trees have become great towering specimens and the garden has settled comfortably into maturity. Formal lines and informal planting: always a winning combination. □

of Anky’s favourite plants for autumn

1 *Actaea matsumurae* ‘White Pearl’

A wonderful late-season plant. Tall and haughty of bearing, it is good in a bit of partial shade although it needs some moisture in the soil. 1.2m. USDA 3a-8b[†].

2 *Persicaria amplexicaulis* ‘Firetail’

All persicarias flower for an incredibly long time, and many of the best have been bred by the Dutch. This one is vigorous and endowed with great foliage. Hates dry soil. 1.2m. USDA 5a-9b.

3 *Tricyrtis formosana* ‘Purple Beauty’

A delicate and always surprising late perennial. Excellent for partial or full shade although it appreciates some shelter as well. Mulch if weather is very cold. 50cm.

4 *Dahlia* ‘Black Jack’

A semi-cactus cultivar with burnished green foliage. Deadhead regularly and bring inside for the winter. 1.4m.

5 *Dahlia* ‘Gwyneth’

Its dark-green leaves set off the many petalled flowers. In the official language of dahlias it is a small-flowered waterlily type. 1.5m.

6 *Dahlia* ‘Honka Red’

With its slightly twisted windmill petals the ‘Honka’ series is one of the simplest flowered dahlias in a range of colours. *D.* ‘Honka’ is a wonderful custard yellow. Protect from frost. 1m.

7 *Aster ericoides* species

A very bushy and enthusiastic aster with more flowers than you can easily count. A North American native, it works well with grasses and persicarias. 90cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

8 *Pelargonium sidoides*

One of the most elegant of pelargoniums, with spindly stems and greyish leaves. Needs a greenhouse in which to shelter over winter. AGM*. RHS H1c, USDA 9a-11.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
[†]Hardiness ratings given where available.

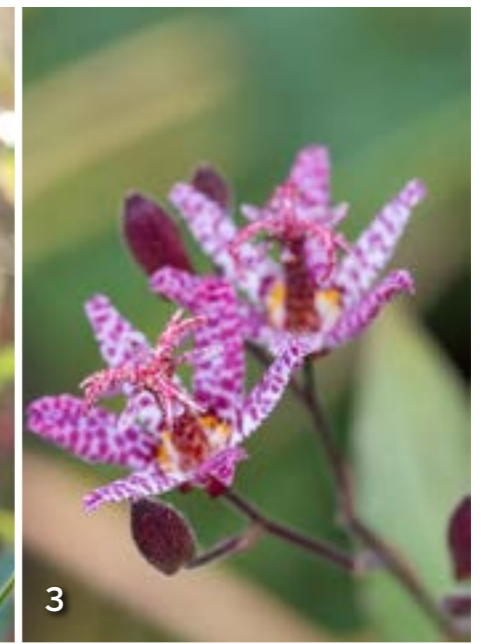


Image isn't 'Gwyneth'. Change caption

Not Gwyneth

