



MORE HERE THAN MEETS

A common reaction from people embarking on a visit to Colin and Verena Olle's garden is "Oh, good, there's more!"

And it is true that as you enter at one side of the house there is a patio area to walk through with a stream and a pond bordered with cobblestones, most of which the Olles have dug out of the garden since they moved in 22 years ago. It takes a while to appreciate its full extent and how many interesting features it has.

Today there is so much variety in the garden which is divided into "rooms" that it is difficult to visualise the original plot they took over: basically grass, crazy paving and conifer hedges.

Colin and Verena assure me they never had a master plan, but that the garden has evolved over the years. "Anyway, we've learned that you don't always get it right first time round," says Verena, who hatches the original ideas. "When Colin sees me brooding over part of the garden, he gets worried! He is the one who translates the ideas into designs, usually after getting our garden designer daughter to look at them too."

"She usually manages to improve on them", adds Colin who carries out all the hard landscaping, designs and builds pergolas, arches and wooden obelisks which support clematis, roses and other climbers throughout the garden.

He also maintains the several areas of grass. "I don't do lawns, I mow the grass, mostly with a cylinder mower. Naturally there are weeds, but I like daisies", he asserts unrepentantly.

Croft Acre has formal as well as informal

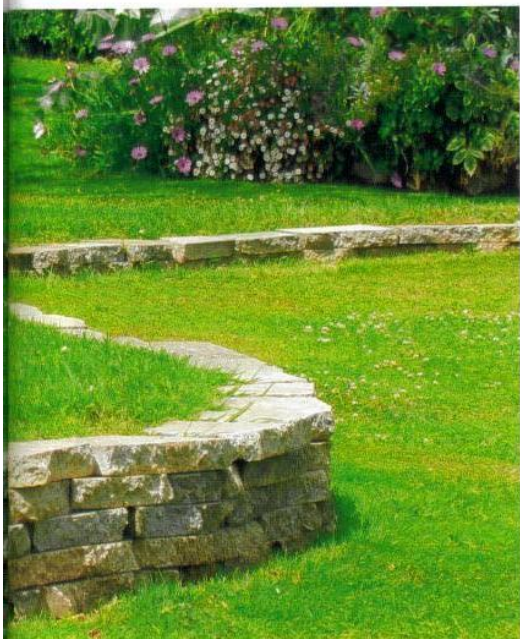
Colin and Verena Olle talk to Joan Stephens about their beautiful South Kilworth garden

areas, and is designed as a series of different spaces. "Basically it is a long garden, so we have tried to create an impression of width", Verena explains. Most hedges are beech and a splendid weeping beech in the centre of one "room" leads the eye towards the end of the garden, reached via a formal brick paved area with curving beech hedges, and a small pond with a "copper tree" water feature. There are roses a-plenty, including *Rambling Rector*, and the flower beds are planted in blocks of colour, with lavender, alliums and *Verbena bonariensis*.

This leads on to the Yin Yang area designed by their daughter Helen, with curving shapes, contrasting grass areas and pebbles, all created to provide an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, ideal for contemplation. In one corner is a chestnut grown from a conker back in 1980, and a neat circular designer gap in the hedge tempts visitors to look through into the field beyond.

Elsewhere the Olles have planted many specimen trees – *Catalpa*, *Acers*, *Liquidambar*, *Sorbus*





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mitchellii, Ginko and many more. In May, their pride and joy is a flourishing *Davidia involucrata*, known as the handkerchief tree, with its large white bracts or "hankies". It is the envy of their gardening friends.

Even the vegetable garden, really a series of square beds, is laid out on designer lines, with plantings in triangles. Colin is an assiduous composter, so their alluvial soil has been enhanced over the years with the fine compost from three large heaps which efficiently re-cycle their garden waste. Here too is Verena's seedling nursery: she grows plants for sale from seedlings and cuttings, and also grows several varieties of hostas in pots which make a talking point for visitors in summer.

She loves white flowers and is especially proud of the white wisteria swarming over a new pergola, but also points out the purple flowers of the *Akebia quinata* which grows up the pergola too, as well as covering one side of the house.

Commonly known as "the chocolate vine", true to its description, it wafts a delicious scent of cocoa products on the air, particularly at dusk.

On Open Days (this year, June 14 and July 5), the "garden café" offers homemade teas as they should be served: in bone china cups and beneath gazebos – the atmosphere is reminiscent of wedding reception.

