



GARDENS

PREDICTING TRENDS

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CLIPPINGS

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The kindest cut

Hardy geraniums have been the workhorses of the garden all summer long, and there is plenty of life in them yet. But you have a choice: squeeze the last few flowers out of your exhausted, sprawling plants, or chop them back now. Given a good trim, the plant still has time to put on a small neat mound of fresh growth to carry it through autumn, and will look tidy all winter. Otherwise, cut back your messy mass of tangled stems in spring.

A breath of fresh air

Spare a thought for the poor gasping fishes. As water warms up on hot days, it is able to hold less dissolved oxygen. Make sure at least half of your pond is open to the air (you may need to be ruthless with any thuggish pond plants), and do not tolerate duckweed on the surface or blanket weed beneath. Oxygen levels reach their lowest as dawn approaches after a particularly warm day, so leave a fountain or waterfall overnight to prevent crisis in the depths.

Plant of the week

Despite its delicate looks, pure white passionflower 'Constance Elliott' is a vigorous climber, hardier than its better-known purple relative. Plant in a sheltered spot in sun or partial shade and mulch in winter. Readers can order one 'Constance Elliott' in a two-litre pot for £19.95, or two for £29.90. Price includes UK mainland p&p. Call 0870 836 0908, quoting reference GUPW148. Delivery within 28 days.



CLIP PHOTOS: ANDREW BEECH

Perhaps my most dreaded question in journalistic terms is "Which plants are going to be in fashion next season?" Can plants be fashionable? And if they are, who decides they are?

At Chelsea Flower Show it's often obvious what is the next fashion – that's when the same plants, and often the same plant combinations, crop up again and again. Many of the plants for the show gardens and some of the displays in the floral pavilions are supplied by a handful of wholesale nurseries, but plans for the gardens are submitted way ahead of the show so it can't just be a question of nurserymen deciding the year before and flooding the Chelsea market.

The fashion business has always intrigued me. Why does everyone elect for a certain length of skirt,

width of belt or the same colour? And does this also happen in the realms of plant style? As with most aspects of our lives, it is commerce that dictates what we will grow, but how do the big nurseries decide what they want to sell us? Often the spotlight falls on a particular plant because it personifies a trend already manifesting itself in the general gardening consciousness.

At a time when dreamy idealism is taking over and everyone wants to create a meadowy effect, wafty grasses of the ilk of *Stipa tenuissima* abound, mingling with blobs of poppies, or plateaux of achilleas wend their way to the fore. When the emphasis is on wildflower conservation, then wild carrot,

Foliage takes a starring role in Tom Stuart-Smith's Chelsea display

Daucus carota, will lift its pretty umbels among sheep's-bit scabious. Was the predominance of green at this year's Chelsea down to last year's wet verdancy and the dearth of flowers or to a spontaneous consensus among the garden design elite? Ferns, asarum, grasses such as *Hakonechloa macra* and the foliage of epimediums took the leading role on Tom Stuart-Smith's garden, and next door, Andy Sturgeon's design was brimming with green.

Demand for a plant is increased by an airing on TV, but the media tends to pick up on trends rather than set them. Though clothes may look better on some figures than others, anyone can wear anything. Plants are different: fashion must follow practicality. No matter how trendy, ferns will never flourish in a suntrap nor dahlias delight in deep shade.