



The wildlife pond was once a swimming pool



The cutting garden





# Creating connections

A once enclosed Bovingdon garden has been gradually transformed into a flowing space connected to the house and its countryside setting

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**D**acorum House sits in gently rolling countryside on the edge of the Chilterns. Beautiful views surround the Bovingdon home but a mature garden and high hedges obscured them. Fiona and Rob MacLean lived here with their family for 13 years before deciding to improve the three acre garden, and asked James Scott, MD and principal designer of The Garden Company based in the neighbouring village of Chipperfield, to help redesign the outdoor space and implement the ideas Fiona had been forming.

One of her key requirements was to transform the barely used swimming pool into a wildlife pond. As James walked around the garden it was clear however that other aspects of the garden also needed much improvement.

‘The house was surrounded by beautiful countryside,’ he recalls, ‘but the garden wasn’t connecting with this or the house or bringing them together, although there was great potential to do so.’

The designer spent time taking in the many aspects of the garden and considering how the flow could be improved to link its different areas. He wanted to keep as much of the existing planting as possible but add and embellish borders with new plants and create new features.

‘There were some very nice mature specimen trees – yews clipped into domes as well as some other good plants that added structure and evergreen interest, but some planting just didn’t sit well in the garden or had grown too mature and straggly.’



There was a fair amount of hedging, and simple changes like reducing the height of a boundary hedge from nearly eight feet to under five made a huge difference by opening up views over fields beyond. Another tall hedge made a small woodland area inaccessible so James took out one of the conifer trees from the hedge to create access from the garden. The gap left bare branches either side as conifers don't tend to re-grow in these circumstances or when cut back hard. Fiona and Rob commissioned Somerset-based willow artist Barbara Clift to create an archway in-situ to frame the shape of the tree that was removed, which not only created an unusual feature but was also a creative solution to the bare-branched gap left behind.

Over the next couple of years the garden was gradually instilled with a new lease of life as views and vistas were opened up, paths made to link areas and create a route around the garden, and new planting added for impact and interest throughout the seasons which also blended with and enhanced the existing planting. A new cutting garden with four box-edged beds provides cut flowers throughout the year. It's a key feature in the garden and the old mower shed next to it was renovated to make a new garden room, a perfect place to sit, relax and enjoy the space.

The old swimming pool did get its major transformation. The deep turquoise-lined pool that was out of character with the house and its surroundings is now a

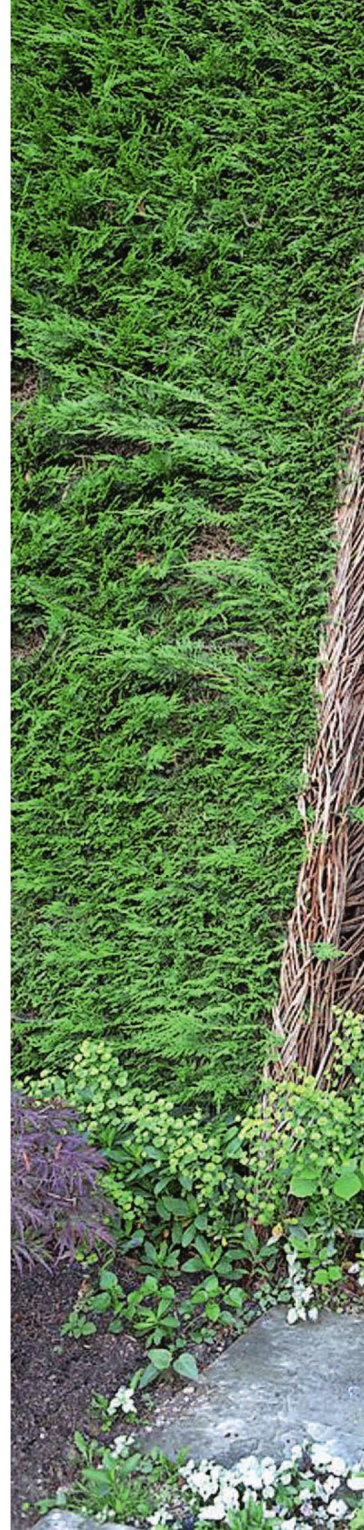
contemporary wildlife pond with 'floating' stepping stones running across it. James says it was quite an engineering feat.

'We cut off the water circulation and filled most of the deep end with rubble, then capped everything with concrete to make it stable.' Along the pond edges, shallow planting beds have created easy access to and from the water for wildlife, while sturdy plinths support the stepping stone

## *'The swimming pool is now a wildlife pond with floating stepping stones'*

path. The terrace area surrounding the pond was redesigned to link it to the house, with new perennial flower borders adding vibrancy and colour. Next to the pond, James added a line of stately *Carpinus betulus* 'Fastigiata' which cohesively blends the formal and informal areas of the garden.

'My aim was to gradually release the garden from its enclosed compartments and connect both the garden and the house to the surrounding Hertfordshire countryside,' explains James. His method was to do this gradually and subtly and with lots of light touches. It's a plan that has worked very well. ♦



### **ABOVE:**

The crafted willow arch in a hedge links the garden to the woodland. Wisteria clothing the house is reflected in the purples and greens of the border

### **LEFT:**

New plants blend with existing mature shrubs. New planting under the hornbeam trees

### **RIGHT:**

James recommends using different alliums to extend the planting season





## Planting 'musical notes'

Alliums are James Scott's favourite plants and he's used them throughout the garden at Dacorum House.

'I love to use alliums in my planting schemes. They have an ethereal quality and seem to float like musical notes through a planting scheme. I recommend using several different varieties to get a variation in flower size, colour and height and also to

extend the flowering period. A mix I often use is Allium 'Giganteum', A. 'Globemaster', A. 'Violet Beauty' and A. 'Purple Sensation'. I find these come back and even multiply year after year. I can't help adding in Allium 'Atropurpureum' as well for its deep colour in late May to early June. However, I find you have to replant as it doesn't come back so well each year.'