



Looking back towards the house at Brightwater Gardens, the view reveals garden rooms that decrease in formality further from the property.

Bright and breezy

Visit this RHS Partner Garden in rural Lincolnshire to enjoy a design that unfolds from formal garden rooms to plantings that flow into the surrounding countryside »

Author: [Nicola Oakey](#), garden writer and RHS Young Designer of the Year Finalist 2018. Photography: [Lee Beel](#)

A gravel pathway meanders through the Dry Garden that is home to Chris and Jonathan's *Salvia* collection. This includes deep purple-flowering *S. 'Amistad'* AGM at the front and vivid pink *S. microphylla 'Cerro Potosi'* AGM in the centre and to the left.



At Brightwater Gardens there is a feeling of permanence, as if it has always existed in the village of Saxby, 10 miles north of Lincoln. Wide herbaceous borders, sweeping lawns and a series of garden rooms make it hard to believe that the garden was started less than 20 years ago.

Chris Neave and Jonathan Cartwright inherited the plot of land in 2000 and set about demolishing a 1930s bungalow and building their new house on its footprint. 'There was absolutely nothing here, apart from a shelter belt down the north side,' says Jonathan. 'The bungalow had a small garden around it, but otherwise it was just rough grass paddocks.'

The 3.2ha (8 acre) garden was split into three areas



A series of terracotta urns create repetition down a pathway in the Long Terrace, as do domes of box that also bring structure to the planting.

and each has been carefully designed. Surrounding three sides of Chris and Jonathan's home, the series of garden rooms is the first area and the earliest part of the garden they created. The rooms are neatly aligned to the building, with hedges and pathways seamlessly running from the walls of the house. In a flat Lincolnshire landscape, it helps ground the property and creates private spaces.

Each room meanders into the next with focal points to lure you through gaps in the hedges. Some areas have a traditional feel, such as the Long Terrace planted with shrub roses and tender perennials, or the Obelisk Lawn enclosed by a stilted hedge of large-leaved limes, *Tilia platyphyllos 'Rubra'* AGM. The Solar Garden has a modern feel and gets its name from 16 solar panels, around which the space is designed.

Moving away from the house, formal hedges give way to the gently unfolding Hillside Lawn, which is flanked by strips of meadow grass planted with

spring bulbs and unusual specimen trees, and by the Winter Garden. Here, in 2006, Jonathan and Chris began planting more than 140,000 snowdrops, including plenty around the Hillside Lawn, and are continuing to plant more: the gardens open every spring for their Snowdrop Fortnight.

At the end of the lawn is Pindle Pond and, beyond that, open countryside. Sitting by the pond, looking at clouds reflected in the water, the manicured garden around the house feels distant. 'As we are in the countryside, we wanted the garden to flow into the landscape,' says Chris. An additional spur of land from the main garden leads down a 4.5ha (11 acre) woodland walk, with another pond at its end.

'We have discovered that prairie-style planting works well on our soil.'

The height of the large-leaved limes, *Tilia platyphyllos 'Rubra'*, which surround the Obelisk Garden creates a link with the imposing central monument.



Contrasting conditions

It is not a complete rural idyll for Jonathan and Chris: the southwest-facing garden is in an elevated position and, although protected from northerly winds by the shelter belt, it is still exposed to the west. However, the cleverly designed garden rooms have their practical uses: framed by tall, established yew hedges, there is always a sheltered corner to sit in.

Soil conditions vary across the garden. Around the house it is sandy and free draining, but down to the pond the soil becomes heavier with clay. Home-made compost is incorporated into free-draining areas and Chris and Jonathan have experimented to find plants that do best. 'We have discovered that herbaceous prairie-style planting works well on our soil,' says Chris.

Salvias are a particular favourite in their borders and their collection is gradually expanding. Asters are also appreciated late-season: 'The foliage provides interest earlier in the year,' says Chris. 'Then flowers are an added bonus from late August to October.' Among the big swaths of planting, they incorporate dahlias to fill gaps and add dots of contrast.

There is even one corner of the garden that is aptly named The Damp Valley. A spring keeps the soil here continuously moist and provides further planting >>

In the Dry Garden, bold drifts of Chris and Jonathan's plantings – including *Penstemon* 'Red Riding Hood' in the foreground – create a colourful backdrop for this bust of 'Capability' Brown, one of the many focal points around the gardens.



opportunities. There could not be a starker contrast than standing with the fine, almost dust-like soil around your feet, looking down on the gigantic, thriving leaves of a *Gunnera*.

With so many different habitats, it comes as no surprise that the garden attracts wildlife. The range of plants, from the first snowdrops through to the last asters, means that there are always plenty of pollinators about. 'When you see bumblebees flying around, or birds bringing their fledglings, you realise there's definitely a place in this garden for them, too,' says Jonathan. The pair are already conscious of their gardening footprint and plan to become even more environmentally responsible.

For many, the range of different conditions found in just one garden could have felt like more of a curse than a blessing. However, Chris and Jonathan's openness to embrace all of Brightwater's different personalities has allowed them to create a garden that is sensitive of the location and conditions, but does not compromise on beauty. 'In the evening, when the sun is setting, we sit and look down the lawn towards the pond and watch the sunset,' says Jonathan. 'It is spectacular to watch the sun going down through trees that you've planted – that's what makes it all worthwhile.' ○

Visiting Brightwater Gardens

The Garden House, Saxby, Market Rasen, Lincoln LN8 2DQ; 01673 878820; brightwatergardens.co.uk

Overview: rural garden carefully designed around the house, conditions and surrounding landscape.

Key seasons: early spring for bulbs, midsummer to autumn for the herbaceous borders.

Open: 11am–4pm Fri–Sat until 27 Aug, and Fri–Sun 28–30 Sept; RHS Partner Garden for 2018

(see *RHS Members' Handbook 2018*, p70), free to RHS members. Non-members £5.

Accessibility: some gravel paths, steps and slopes but most areas accessible.



BRIGHTWATER GARDENS