Right on track

Situated beside a railway line, this productive garden complements a home designed as a model for sustainable living. Happily, beauty is at the heart of its design too.

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In brief

- A mixed fruit, vegetable and flower garden
- Designed to be water-efficient and climate-appropriate
- Where: Central London
- Size: 8,000 square metres
- Soil: Initially poor and infertile, but improved by constant composting
- Climate: Dry but shaded in summer, occasional sun
- Hardiness: USDA 8

Imagine China Cottage's naturally blending garden, with Zinnia 'Fandango', Allium 'Purple Sensation' and Allium 'Giant of Inland' creating a visually stunning display.
urban eco garden

Deep shade can be a problem, but here it is made a virtue of with the creation of a successful fernery planted with Dryopteris felix-mas, Lomnica pasqualis (commonly known as Dryopteris cristata) and Polystichum setiferum.

A small brick terrace made of warm red Riddagick brick provides an outside eating area. The same brick has been used to build a wall beside the building containing Alum and clematis.

A York Minster Cathedral (c. 1400 A.D.) and Gothic pillars create a cottage garden effect against the backdrop of an ultra-modern house.

A further red grass Carex morrowii x ‘Atrofusca’ ‘Karl Foerster’ provides structure for the perennial bed, overhanging by a silver birch. Seen from above, the white dots of Alum nigrum show up well against the emerald hedges of the grass Hakonechloa macra.

Design ideas

Practical tips from Sarah Wigglesworth (left) and Emma Griffin for a more sustainable garden

Utilise all your space, and work every inch of three-dimensional space in your garden. You can maximise your growing area by training espaliered apple and plum trees (2) against retaining walls. Try to see vertical as well as horizontal space by growing climbing plants (beans, goards etc.) up strong metal supports (3). And don’t ignore shady areas. Ferns, including Dryopteris felix-mas, and other shade-loving plants, such as Tricyrtis x hirta ‘Orientalis’, Polystichum setiferum and Lomnica pasqualis spectacularly grow wonderfully in the deep shade of tall buildings (4). Think about collecting rainwater into a large tank sunk underground. Increase the green footprint of your house by growing a green roof (5) in this case an impermeable membrane was laid across the roof with a thin layer of soil on top. Link your garden to your house so it becomes an easily accessible extension to your home. Here an outside staircase (7) links the raised building to the garden. Consider raising all or simply part of the building (8) as this provides you with extra space beneath (here it’s home to chickens).

1. The house is insulated with straw bales faced with corrugated metal and clear plastic. Outside steps lead down into the garden, where raspberry canes grow exuberantly.
2. The very poor wall in this bed has been improved over time. Now the leafy grass Carex morrowii ‘Atrofusca’ 'Karl Foerster’ speeding butterflies, the copper orange aroid Alpinia officinarum, and Salvia officinalis ‘Purpurascens’ (common sage) all thrive here.
3. Metal bars are welded together to make a frame for climbing plants in the raised beds. Using this common building material in the garden echoes the way these materials have been made a very visible part of the house’s construction.
4. The garden works well as a potager. Flowers, brightly and useful, are expressed in a border were the ornamental onion Allium nigrum mingle with herbs such as thyme, Allium schoenoprasum, and Salvia officinalis ‘Purpurascens’.
plants in this scheme remain, there is now a new approach to colour with 'filigree Orange Emperor' and Nacinina triangala 'Ice King' providing spring colour followed by Allium hollandicum 'Purple Sensation' and gladiolus 'Giant Men'.

Emna's brief was to increase the food-growing area, while retaining some features of the old garden. Improving the poor soil was one of the biggest challenges. The foundations were just below the surface; one bed was full of lean sand and mortar while another was filled with clay soil and rocks. One area became very hot and dry in summer and killed almost everything planted there.

Sarah and Jeremy also wanted to keep the original cobbled courtyard behind the entrance gates, as well as two birch arbours, a herbaceous border, a pond and two small apple trees and four bamboo (Phyllostachys aurea). A big success is the new fernery, a border that runs in the deeply shaded space at the back of the house.

One of the clever things about this garden is the way building materials like its design to the house. Raspberries, potatoes, courgettes and cacti grow in four raised beds edged in oak sleepers. In the beds are iron poles welded together to make a support for beans and climbing plants. These are rebar, the rust-colored grooved iron poles that are common construction kit, and hark back to the site's original use as a forge that made bell foundings. "I like how it ties strongly to the textures and feel of the building," says Emma.

USEFUL INFORMATION
Address: 10 Stock Orchard Street, London N7 9RN.
Open: 20 October 2015.

Eco features

1. Nothing is wasted in this garden. The timber offcuts from the raised beds were faced with chicken wire, to make them grippy, and used as stepping stones through the flower garden.

2. Three compost bins at the side of the house deal, separately, with waste from both garden and house.

3. The roof meadow was originally planted with common teasel (Dipsacus fullonum), but these are now mixed with numerous species of wild grass and other self-seeders.

4. Buff Sussex (pinto) as they lay just enough eggs - unlike many hybrid species, which have a tendency to lay too many.

5. Sarah and Jeremy have opted for pure breed chickens, Rhode Island Reds and Buff Sussex (pinto), as they lay just enough eggs - unlike many hybrid species, which have a tendency to lay too many.

6. Three compost bins at the side of the house deal, separately, with waste from both garden and house.

7. The roof meadow was originally planted with common teasel (Dipsacus fullonum), but these are now mixed with numerous species of wild grass and other self-seeders.