

Flying COLOURS

Autumn is the most radiant month at Logie House in Moray, where Panny Laing, a believer in year-round interest, has swept away formal planting to fill the grounds with shrubs, trees and perennials that illuminate the shorter days

WORDS **JULIA WATSON** PHOTOGRAPHS **RAY COX**

A view up towards Logie House takes in crimson maples, blue aconitums and yellow helianthus.



The octagonal gloriëtte known as the 'Glory Octo' was made by the Laings' son Alec. Rodgersia, persicaria and bergenia line the burn.



Autumn is a colourful season in the walled garden of Logie House, but it has not always been that way. Panny Laing has transformed the five-acre garden she and her husband Alasdair inherited some 30 years ago, sweeping away formality, planting a mass of trees and shrubs and opening up a long-buried burn. The result is a scenic space that holds interest all year round but positively glows with colour as the days shorten.

Looking down over the River Findhorn in the north-east corner of Scotland, Logie House dates back to the early 18th century. It is at the heart of an estate that has been in Alasdair's family since 1924, when it was bought by his great-great grandfather, Alexander Grant, a local boy made good, who rose from modest origins as an apprentice baker in Forres to become owner of McVitie's, and who was famed for inventing their iconic digestive biscuit.

When Panny and Alasdair swapped houses with Alasdair's mother in 1991 and moved into Logie House with their three children, the walled garden

Above Golden *Betula ermanii* on the left, bright red *Acer micranthum* on the right. Amber prunus leaves blanket the path. **Below** Panny Laing, with a tray of 'Discovery' apples ready to be juiced for the farm shop.

below it, leading down to the river, held vegetables, soft fruit and a cutting garden. There was also a herbaceous border and a formal parterre, for which thousands of antirrhinums and begonias were grown each year and dug out at the end of summer. "There was lovely colour from June to September, but then there was all this bare earth," Panny recalls.

Having grown up with a woodland garden in Kent, she was a staunch believer that gardens should be places of interest all year round, so she decided to put in trees and shrubs to augment the handful of apple trees already there and make more growing spaces for perennials. She also aimed to simplify what she describes as "fiddly bits" of hedge, lawn and flowerbed to create a layout that flowed more easily.

It was not just an aesthetic issue. As she points out, "When you garden, every time you change from bed to grass to path, it's hard work because there's an edge to take care of." The garden in her mother-in-law's day required a full-time gardener, but by making it less labour-intensive, Panny hoped she might be able to run it herself with part-time help.



Trained as a paper conservator, Panny brought an artistic eye to the task, but she also sought the advice of local designer and plantsman Gavin Dallmeyer, who had helped the Laings with the garden at their previous home, just a mile away. “Gavin, who sadly died not long ago, was a knowledgeable plantsman, with a natural eye for design,” she says. Together they rationalised the design and planted specimens to bring height and visual interest to the garden, including 20 fruit trees and a double shrub border where an old polytunnel had once stood.

As the new introductions matured, the shelter they created had a marked effect on conditions in the garden. “There are tall trees outside the garden on one side, but when we first moved in it went straight from the tall trees down to the wall and flat down to the garden level, so there was no microclimate at all,” says Panny, “but in 2008 I vividly remember walking in and feeling it, and thinking ‘wow, we’re going to be able to grow some things here’.”

Excited by the possibility of expanding the range of plants, Panny hatched the idea of opening up

Below A view down to the pond, which was made by Panny’s parents-in-law, over the colourful leaves of deciduous azaleas.

the burn that ran through a pipe under the garden. Originally diverted through a pipe because it caught some of the effluent from the dairy, with the dairy herd gone it was now possible to open it up again. The pipe had regularly – and annoyingly – been blocked by hedge roots previously, so opening it up made good sense all round. As before, Panny enlisted Gavin’s help with the plans for this second phase of the garden’s transformation, although carrying out the actual work took a great deal longer than anyone could have anticipated.

“We took off the topsoil, and piled it in the middle of the lawn, so we had Mount Everest sitting there for what we thought was going to be one winter but actually turned into three years,” says Panny. The digger driver contracted to carve out a bed for the burn was one of the estate’s tenant farmers, and the dry stone dyker building the bridges and walls mainly worked as a ghillie, so both were available only in winter, and Moray promptly suffered two of the coldest and snowiest winters in many years. But in the third winter the project was finally completed,



Above left Seeds and coral-coloured foliage of *Acer griseum*.
Above right Purple leaves of *Cotinus* ‘Grace’ blaze red when the sun shines through them.
Right A self-sown *Euonymus europaeus* drips with carmine-pink berries next to richly coloured *Cotinus coggygria* ‘Royal Purple’.





Above The fiery autumn colours of deciduous shrub *Enkianthus campanulatus*, which thrives on acid soil.

and the burn once again flowed down through the garden, its banks planted with moisture-lovers and woodlanders

like *rodgersia*, *hostas*, *omphalodes* and *Corydalis elata*. It was well worth the wait.

Wandering around the garden today highlights how much has changed. Autumn colour now comes from trees such as *Betula ermanii*, which Panny loves for its pale cream bark and butter-coloured foliage – “People get so excited about *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*, but it just turns a boring brown” – or the spindle tree, *Euonymus europaeus*, which bears spectacular red and orange fruits. There are *cotinus*, with dark purple leaves that light up red in the sun, Kashmir rowans with white berries and delights like the prolific crab apple *Malus* ‘Harry Baker’: “We have to take the fruit off to prevent the branches from breaking,” says Panny.

In the borders, late summer colour lingers in the form of pink *nerines*, blue *aconitums*, the beautiful white heads of *Hydrangea* ‘Annabelle’ and the attractive yellow flowers of *Helianthus* ‘Lemon Queen’. A plant Panny especially prizes is *Kirengeshoma palmata*, introduced into the garden by Gavin Dallmeyer. “It’s part of the *hydrangea* family and its petals are almost quilted.”

With children and, now, grandchildren of her own, Panny has made sure that there are features in the garden for youngsters to enjoy. Stepping stones have been put in so that they can hop across the burn, and an old Irish yew, already hollowed by decay, has been carved out even more to make a hidey hole. In the orchard there is a giant stone apple

Sugar & SPICE

Late-flowering perennials and shrubs bring sweetshop colour to autumn’s gilded shades



NERINE BOWDENII

Bubblegum-pink flowers are produced by this autumn-flowering bulb, which enjoys a sunny, sheltered spot.



KIRENGESHOMA PALMATA

A choice perennial for light shade, with pale yellow, shuttlecock-shaped flowers.



HYDRANGEA ‘ANNABELLE’

H. arborescens ‘Annabelle’ often produces its huge flowerheads into October.



ASTER ‘ANDENKEN AN ALMA PÖTSCHKE’

This New England aster (now *symphyotrichon*) flowers vibrantly throughout autumn.



ACONITUM ‘ARENDSII’

Spires of hooded blue-purple flowers on this *A. carmichaelii* cultivar that reaches 1.5m tall.



HELIANTHUS ‘LEMON QUEEN’

Masses of yellow daisy flowers brighten up borders from August to autumn. 2m tall.



Above Autumn leaves of *Parrotia persica* display a multitude of vivid hues. **Right** Below the house, pampas grass plumes stand out in a border of shrubs including spiraea.

and a pear made by a local artist.

The garden is far from being Panny's only concern. Soon after she and Alasdair took on the running of

the 4,500-acre estate, they received support from the Highlands and Islands Development Board to convert the home farm's former steading buildings into shops and workshops to house independent businesses. The venture has become a renowned success, attracting over 70,000 visitors a year, with a cafe, bookshop, whisky shop, antique restorer and more contributing greatly to the local economy.

Son Alec now has an outlet there for the timber mill he runs – his firm made the garden's 'Glory Octo' gloriette – and Panny herself introduced an art gallery and later a farm and garden shop into the mix, selling local produce, including meat from her small herd of Longhorns, and plants trialled and propagated on site that are suited to local conditions.

Although all these enterprises have grown, Panny still manages to be her own head gardener, these days with the assistance of four part-time staff and volunteer helpers, and WWOOFers, who visit under the auspices of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Logie may seem such a peaceful place, but behind the scenes, it's never been busier. ■

Logie House, Dunphail, Forres, Moray IV36 2QN. The gardens are open daily, 10am to 5pm, until 31 December, with donations from the £2 admission charge going to beneficiaries of Scotland's Garden Scheme. Check opening times for 2022 on the website. Tel: 01309 611278; email: panny@logie.co.uk; logie.co.uk; scotlandsgardens.org



A thoughtful APPROACH

Advice from Panny Laing on improving soil, garden design and getting the most from your plants

I call our soil 'improved sandy loam'. It's slightly acid and has been gardened for a long time. When we were putting back the topsoil in the burn garden, we conditioned it with Remin volcanic rock dust (reminscotland.com), and we use mulch liberally to help the soil retain its moisture.

In the Burn Garden, Gavin Dallmeyer put in a load of stones at a spot by the path where he wanted to create a calm, plant-free space for people to stop and have a breather. It works.

The Hardy Plant Society's seed scheme is brilliant (available to HPS members, sign up at hardy-plant.org.uk). I am especially glad to have acquired a lot of different hardy geraniums, such as *Geranium robustum*, which grows on the bank below the house.

Even if you buy a plant on the spur of the moment – we all do it – don't just plant it anywhere. It is worth taking time to find the exact spot where something is able to grow happily, and where the leaf and the size and the colour work.