

Gordon was a finalist the Daily Mail's National Garden Competition in 2015

Gordon Malt, 65, a retired tree surgeon, and his wife Mona, 63, a primary school teacher, live near Shifnal in Shropshire



When Gordon and Mona bought their 1970s bungalow 30 years ago the half-acre garden was overgrown and neglected, but Gordon was undaunted. 'Growing veg has always been a passion of mine, but I wanted flowers too. The challenge was to combine them both and cope with the conditions – we're 500ft above sea level, so it can get pretty chilly.'

The most fertile part of the garden was to the rear of the house, so this is where Gordon made his vegetable plot. 'I grow lettuce, peas, broad beans, Brussels sprouts, celeriac, potatoes, runner beans and asparagus. There are also fruit cages containing strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants, whitecurrants and gooseberries, as well as an orchard of cordon-trained apples.'

Gordon, who describes his style as 'controlled relaxation', has seamlessly mixed the vegetable areas with the flower borders, which are all themed. The pale border is filled with the soft pink hybrid musk rose 'Felicia', thistly blue eryngiums, white phlox, and *Salvia sclarea* var. *turkestanica*, which keeps its blue bracts well into autumn – even if its smell does remind some people of old socks.

Another bed is given over to salvias and ornamental grasses. 'Salvias are such great plants, which flower over a long period, and there are so many to choose from. I especially like peachy-orange *Salvia x jamensis* 'California Sunset', deep blue *Salvia patens* 'Guanajuato', and the intensely red *Salvia blepharophylla*.'

Other beds are devoted to plants with silver foliage, and to flowers that are at their peak from July onwards such as crocosmias, eupatorium and the buddleia 'Pink Delight'.

The garden is a labour of love for Gordon. 'I'm out there every day, whatever the season. Mona enjoys the garden, but she leaves the work to me. We both get a lot of satisfaction from opening the garden for local charities, and it's great to meet people who want to talk about plants.' Gordon entered the Daily Mail National Garden Competition on a whim and was 'stumped for words' to hear that he'd got through to the last four. 'It's a great thrill – it's been a wonderful experience.'

Tim Sharples' verdict 'Gordon has used his love of trees, perennials and vegetables to create an eclectic garden where everything is superbly well grown'