

Garden OF THE WEEK



Gardeners Malcolm and Wendy Fisher
Location Capability Barn, Hoveringham, Nottinghamshire
Size Two acres
Soil Sandy loam, some small areas of clay
Been in garden 24 years
Visiting By appointment through the National Garden Scheme (NGS); ngs.org.uk



This beautiful Nottinghamshire garden has evolved over time to become a paradise full of mature trees, rhododendrons and picture perfect perennial borders. Right, this time of year means glorious colour from rhododendrons



The Fishers grow around 20 hostas in pots



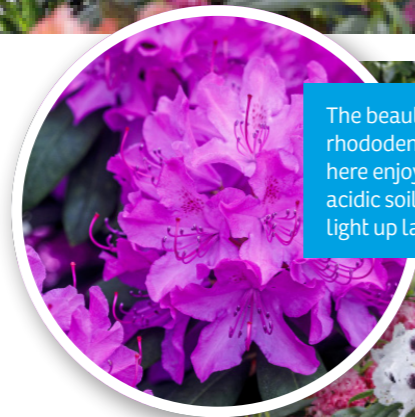
Labour of love!

Malcolm and Wendy Fisher don't mind getting their hands dirty as their garden is reward for all the hard work

Words Simon Caney
Photos Neil Hepworth

As the old adage goes, if you want a job doing, do it yourself! Although when that job involves moving 70 tons of soil by hand, one might be forgiven for asking for assistance. Not Malcolm and Wendy Fisher though - their garden at Capability

Barn (a nod to legendary gardener Capability Brown, whose portrait hangs in the Fishers' hallway) in Nottinghamshire sat on two acres of undulating terrain that needed levelling out, so Malcolm and Wendy got out the barrows and moved every ounce themselves. That was back around the turn of the millennium and while it was hard work indeed, the results today are there for all to see.



The beautiful rhododendrons here enjoy the acidic soil and light up late spring



"When we moved in there was a lot of lawn with trees planted throughout but that was all," says Malcolm. "We selected a few of the nicest trees and kept them, notably some betula and *Prunus serrula*. And then from there it was pretty much a blank canvas. Moving those 70 tons meant we just had a more level area to work with - many

a happy day we spent out there with our shovels and barrows!" Today the garden is split into separate areas - Malcolm is reluctant to call them garden 'rooms' - with a large orchard and paddock too. "When we began I don't think we really had a vision about what

we wanted," he says. "Really the place got its name because we thought it had a lot of capability and we wanted to see what we could do. "We're not great planners. But we are quite creative and I like to think we're innovative. I'm definitely a tinkerer in the garden, always moving things around or trying something new. Over the years

the garden has evolved and grown like Topsy! "In some places it may have got a little too complicated in terms of planting but we love being out there so it's not a problem really. It's the best way to stay fit, after all!" The garden is open to the public twice a year - in mid-April and June - and at other times by appointment. When we spoke to Malcolm it was the day before the couple were to throw open their doors for the April open garden. "It's always a busy time," he said. "And this spring has been colder than usual so we're a bit behind. But there's



A secluded spot in which to enjoy spring's flowering gems, including choisya, cornus and rhododendrons

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The lawn space adds an airy open area to better survey and enjoy the surrounding planting

Lupins, irises and geums spring up around this gorgeous eucalyptus, which stands out as a feature tree



still a lot in flower and hopefully enough to keep people interested.” That seems assured for any visitor as they move through the garden. Rhododendrons abound throughout, filling the

place with colour, enjoying the very slightly acidic soil, which is mainly a very free-draining sandy loam. The house is in the village of Hoveringham, famous for its gravel, which

gives a clue to the nature of the growing medium. “We suggest a certain way for visitors to move through the garden but if they want to find their own route that’s fine. They start with the gravelled area, where we’ve planted a lot of acers, and where there is also a good display of espalier apples. At this time of year the blossom is really nice.” Next is the lawned area opposite the patio, where the majority of tulips are planted. “We’ve done well with tulips,” says Malcolm. “Snowstorm’, ‘Ronald’, ‘Carnival de Rio’ and ‘Hollandia’ are some that look particularly good.”

Other borders are filled with erythroniums, anemones, primulas and pulmonarias, while a rose bed features a range of varieties, although Malcolm’s current favourite is called ‘Marry Me’ (“We loved the name!” he adds, romantically). It provides two big flushes of pink floribunda blooms a year and Malcolm says it is very reliable - “it’s not all that well-known but I think it deserves to be”. One of his favourite areas in the garden is a shady spot where rhododendrons mix with acers, foxgloves, camassia and choisya. “There are always plants that

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Malcolm's favourite plants...



Dahlia 'Kenora Challenger'

I like the giant decoratives; this is a lovely semi-cactus that makes a real impact.



Rhododendrons

I have to include them as I grow so many! They enjoy the soil here and put on such a fantastic show.



Begonias

I used to grow begonias for showing. We don't have as many these days but they're a great plant.



Iris 'Jane Phillips'

We have a lot of irises and this is a really nice pale blue variety that's very reliable.

PHOTOS: ALAMY/SHUTTERSTOCK



Iris 'Jane Phillips' shines in pale blue by the pergola, matching the forget-me-nots in the front border. Dots of colour looks a treat among fresh green spring growth

Tulip 'Hollandia' is one that's done well this year

will relish the shade," he adds. "It's just a question of finding the right plant in the right place."

There's also a hosta area, although the Fishers now choose to plant them in pots - around 20 of them - rather than direct in the soil, while a long stretch of tall holly trees, around 15-18m in height, helps to divide the property and break up lines of sight.

The large fruit and vegetable patch provides food practically all year round; at the moment it's planted with onions, garlic, shallots, new potatoes, asparagus, salads and strawberries, though more crops will go in. Over the years Malcolm

has grown prize-winning vegetables and for many years would also show dahlias and begonias.

The garden is a magnet for wildlife, and not just the usual birds, bees and butterflies. "We get deer, so we have to protect some of the plants from them, and there are a lot of pheasants, foxes, rabbits and a host of small mammals."

The garden has been open through the NGS for around 13 years but Malcolm says he's never completely satisfied with it. "You never get to a point where you think you've finished," he says. "There are always things to do, things to improve. That's the fun of it really!"

...and his top tips

- 1** Always be prepared to change things around - don't let the garden go stale. It's much better to keep it moving; try out new plants and change things up each year.
- 2** Don't pigeonhole yourself - garden across a wide range of subjects and it's much more rewarding. If you've not grown veg before, give it a go. One theme, that stays the same each year, can be a bit boring!

- 3** Move a plant if it's not happy. You may think it would be a perfect fit where you've planted it but it will tell you if it's happy or not, and it pays to try it somewhere different if it's not working out.
- 4** Be careful with compost! As we all try to use less peat it's important to find a growing medium that works in your garden and not all of them will. It's a bit of trial and error I'm afraid.