



Simply Red

Emotive, eye-catching, domineering and flamboyant – could a red garden be your cup of tea?



*Dahlia
Tui Connie*

Canterbury is home to many of New Zealand's most magnificent gardens. Tragically, some were damaged in the recent earthquakes. Others are still welcoming visitors and well worth a trip this coming spring. Tucked away on the outskirts of Ashburton, is an award-winning garden belonging to Alan and Catherine Trott.

Alan is a consummate plantsman, absolutely passionate about plants and gardens and has a wealth of knowledge on every aspect of gardening. The seven acre garden is divided into several different areas including a woodland garden; stream, bog and pond garden; and a magnificent formal garden of a grand scale seldom seen in this country.

One of Alan's most recent pet projects is his Red Garden. He is crazy about red in the garden! Alan was also one of the team involved in the stunning 'I See Red' exhibition garden at Christchurch's inaugural Ellerslie Flower Show in 2009. "Why a red garden – not a white, yellow or blue garden?" The answer is

simple says Alan, "Red has the 'WOW' factor". And he's right. No other colours evoke the same powerful emotional response that red does. While, on the one hand, red signals danger, it also stimulates the mind, is dramatic and energetic, yet warm and passionate too. Alan adds "You should see the excitement on visitors' faces when they see it!"

For his Red Garden, Alan chose a sunny, sheltered area that previously housed a rhododendron collection. He emphasises "Red foliated plants must have plenty of sun, otherwise they turn a murky greenish-purple." Not a good look! Once the rhodos were dug out and gifted to a local golf club, he was left with an area



*Above: Copper beech foliage
Below: Aquilegia Nora Barlow*



Alan and Catherine Trott

80m long x 5m wide, nice undulating curves and, apart from existing structural planting, a blank canvas. Alan was excited at the prospect of starting afresh.

A backdrop of deep green Oregon pine hedging (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) lines the Red Garden. This fulfils one of the few rules of a red garden: implement a solid green foil. Red and green are complementary colours; consequently a green background will enhance red flowers and foliage, and at the same time, calm the overall effect. Alan says there are few other rules that matter, but he advises: "Steer clear of orange-reds; I prefer to stick to dark and 'bloody' reds." He also urges "Don't plant just one of a plant. Plant a group, or en-masse if you have space. The larger the clump, the more impact, which is really important." He does concede there's a lot of trial and error involved in finding the right combination of plants and colours.



*Red cannas, dahlias and Persicaria Firetail (bottom right) with the beautiful burnished-copper bark of *Prunus serrula* (left)*



Poppy Dane Brog Lace

Flower colour aside, Alan's first consideration is actually foliage. "It is MOST important. It MUST look good through the summer months and if it doesn't perform, you MUST get rid of it!" he warns. His favourite foliage plants in the Red Garden include: cannas for their bold, dramatic leaves (and flowers in late summer); the wonderful deep, blackish-red, rounded form of Ligularia 'Britt-Marie Crawford' (he cuts the yellow flowers off!); striking Japanese blood grass (Imperata 'Rubra' or 'Red Baron'); highly textural ornamental rhubarb (Rheum 'Atrosanguineum'); delicate Japanese maples (Acer cultivars); purple leafed elderberry (Sambucus 'Guincho Purple'); Physocarpus 'Shady Lady'; and the new generation,

highly textural, dark foliated dahlias from Dr. Keith Hammett. Beetroot 'Bull's Red' is grown from seed in spring and autumn, not only for its fabulous crop of beets twice yearly, but for its massive, deep purple foliage, which creates an eye-catching swathe when planted en-masse. Topping Alan's list however, is the stunning form of Berberis 'Helmond's Pillar'. Its tall, narrow, upright form, akin to a giant exclamation mark, makes it one of the best accent plants for any garden — not just a red garden.

Flowers are chosen with utmost discretion. In keeping with Alan's parameters for only "deep and blood-red reds" are geraniums, red phlox, bee balm (Monarda) and cannas. These prolific perennials provide the main



Berberis 'Helmond's Pillar' form a striking focal point with other stunning red foliage: Japanese blood grass (right foreground), Ligularia 'Britt-Marie Crawford' (bottom left) and purple barberry (Berberis) hedging.

displays from early spring to late summer. Showy annuals fill the gaps and highly fragrant Oriental lilies are used as accent plants. Roses have been replaced with Alan's flower of the moment — dahlias. He enthuses "Dahlias appear in spring, have wonderful foliage and flower until late autumn when the frost cuts



Red cannas to the rear, red geraniums to the fore, dahlias all around and Persicaria 'Firetail' on the left.



Fragrant Oriental lily



Tree Peony Black Panther



them back, end of story until next spring." Fuss and bother have no place in a garden of this size!

The summer months are, unsurprisingly, Alan's most cherished time in the Red Garden. Its lushness is awe-inspiring, it's colour invigorating and heart warming. Its overall effect is energising – just try keeping up with Alan when he's showing you around! So energising in fact, Alan is now onto his next big project – a Sunset Garden, full of golds, oranges, and reds of course!



Ornamental onion
(*Allium sphaerocephalon*)



Bee balm (Monarda)

The Trott's garden is a Founding Garden of the New Zealand Garden Trust and a Garden of National Significance. An ornate historic chapel is hired out as a wedding and function venue. The gardens provide a magical backdrop to wedding photos!

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Berberis 'Maria'



Butter yellow foliage appears in spring changing to brilliant orange in the autumn! Compact upright growth.

Grevillea 'Lady O'



Bright red flowers will cover this hardy spreading shrub for most of the year. 1m (h) x 2m (w).

Hebe 'Champion'



This little Hebe smothers itself in mauve flowers through the summer and it's easy to grow!

Rosemarinus 'Chef's Choice'



Full of flavour, this little Rosemary is the top choice for top cooks!

Plant near your kitchen for easy access.



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Alan's must haves

Alan has many 'must-have' plants – in fact, too many to mention! Here we put the spotlight on two of his favourites as winter is a good time to plant them.

Happy, healthy maples

- ✓ Locate in a sheltered, sunny to semi-shaded aspect.
- ✓ Plant in well drained, compost enriched soil.
- ✓ Mulch to keep roots cool and damp in summer.
- ✓ Fertilise sparingly in spring (only in poorer soils).
- ✓ Prune lightly, only to shape the tree.

MAPLES

for the best seasonal interest

Of Japanese maples, Alan waxes lyrical! "They're magic in the spring with their new foliage! In summer, they transform the garden into an absolute tapestry of wonderful colour and texture with all their different foliage types and autumn brings an amazing display of fiery colour. What other tree provides all that? They're also suited to large or small gardens and containers. There are weeping, spreading, upright and dwarf forms, and colours range from deep reddish-purple to brilliant lime-green and variegated types too. They're just magnificent!"

Alan adds "I have many favourite maples, but Acer 'Mikawa Yatsubusa' is one that takes the eye year round. Lettuce-green, spring leaves unfold tight and curly. It's gnarly looking in summer and autumn foliage turns to stunning golds and oranges. Winter branches are tight and stumpy – really great architecture."

Happy, healthy dahlias

- ✓ Locate in a sunny sheltered site.
- ✓ Plant in well drained, compost enriched soil, once all danger of frost has passed (start in pots in frost prone areas).
- ✓ Apply slug bait and place stakes before new growth emerges.
- ✓ Liquid feed weekly once flowering begins.
- ✓ Dead head to promote further blooms.

DAHLIAS

for the best summer and autumn colour

Alan enthuses "Dahlias are a must! They come up in spring with few problems. They don't need spraying, don't have prickles and need little help over the summer apart from a bit of dead heading. When they get frosted, they're easy to clean up and make excellent compost!"

He favours single varieties, especially those with good textural foliage, such as Dr Keith Hammett's new generation 'Mystic' Series. 'Mystic Enchantment' and latest release 'Dreamcatcher' are excellent Red Garden varieties. Alan also mentions collarette dahlias, saying "They're rather eye catching, but actually all dahlias have their place."

Alan adds "Dahlias should be lifted in really cold areas, but I don't bother and have few casualties. Instead, I lift and divide them in early October and replant with a little fertilizer."

Dahlia Firemountain

Dahlia Dreamcatcher