



Sally chose pink as the theme for her highly feminine garden, deliberately mixing modern plant cultivars with tried and tested treasures. "Choosing one colour could have been risky", she says, "but then I decided that sticking to a colour theme makes the contrasting shapes stand out."



Pure Passion

Sally Brown of Otago is spreading the love of flowers. **SUE LINN** talks to one of New Zealand's most inspirational young gardeners.

This February the 2014 Ellerslie International Flower Show answered the public's call for more, with double the number of major gardens. The standard was high, but for visitors in search of floral inspiration, one garden stood out above all others.

Sally Brown's "Passion" was arguably the most intensely floral garden ever at the esteemed event. It received both the judges Supreme Award for Horticultural Excellence and the esteemed Yates Peoples Choice Award, adding weight to the message that plants and flowers are what show goers love to see.

For Sally it was the dream

result; the 29-year-old landscape architect is passionate about bringing plants to the forefront of design. "My garden was all about bringing flowers to Ellerslie and I got the response I wanted!"

The plant-packed feature garden was designed with three open sides "so that people could get close to the plants," explains Sally. "I wanted to make combinations that people could achieve in their own gardens."

Such intensity of plant material is not easy to achieve in show gardens, where plants often come second to hard landscaping. Sally believes there is a shortage of

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in-depth plant knowledge among her generation of landscape designers.

She attributes her success to her passion for plants and her close alliance with those in the nursery industry via her family's business, Blueskin Nurseries Garden Centre. "After 4 years working in the garden centre I realise I've built up valuable relationships with our growers. So I felt confident I could ask them to grow things especially for my Ellerslie garden."

Sally began planning for the February 2014 show in winter 2013, discussing her requirements with

growers and placing orders with over 20 different nursery professionals.

"I ended up with at least 30 or 40 people helping me. It actually wouldn't be possible to do it without their help. I did the logistics and planning and I'll take the credit for the designing, but it's a team effort from there on in." Daltons donated 19 pallet loads of potting mix to create the realistic contours. Evandale Gardens of Invercargill was another key sponsor supplying many plants. Her own family's nursery was also a major supplier. "When we ran out of plants Dad just brought a truckload of every

pink plant in the garden centre!"

Will she do it again next year? "Biennially would be enough when you consider the time and expense," she says, "but it isn't too stressful when you enjoy dealing with plants so much."

Sally's full plant list can be found on www.gogardening.co.nz

Clockwise from right:
Sally's Ellerslie garden featured 300 tulips, grown especially for her by Fiesta Bulbs.

Around 2500 plants were packed into the display, many hundreds more than would be required in a real garden of this size.

Sally reshaped an old door to create her romantic gate. The Escallonia hedge, from Twining Valley Nurseries was left untrimmed to suit the theme, leaving its pink flowers intact.



AT HOME IN SALLY'S GARDEN

Sally's real life garden is nestled on an acre of flat ground adjacent to the family nursery. In keeping with her picturesque house and strongly reminiscent of her Ellerslie show garden, it is as you might expect, a flower-filled cottage garden.

In the two and a half years she has lived there Sally has single handedly transformed the garden and is justifiably proud of what she has achieved. "If I was a normal person the inside of the house would be a priority, but for me its all about the garden," she laughs.

Sally spends every spare hour in her garden. After a day working in the garden centre or designing clients' gardens, she isn't content to leave plants alone. "In Dunedin we're light till ten in summer so after work I can get three or four hours gardening in. I just switch off and don't think about anything else apart from my garden. I think when you're really busy it's the best kind of de-stress."

Just like her show garden, Sally's real garden is all about flowers and

colour. So much so that she has planted an entire colour wheel. Pinks and reds merge into purples and blues then greens, yellows and oranges, all set around a circular lawn.

"Flowers are a lot of work, admits Sally, "but they're worth it. I love having picked bunches of flowers inside the house. And it's so nice to take a big bunch of home picked flowers when you visit people."

She makes sure she has something in flower every day of the year. She is careful, however, to include evergreen trees and shrubs for structure and foliage colour. "You do need these in your garden otherwise in winter there's nothing there." For example, the pink garden features shrubs with silver and purple foliage. As a permanent accent in the yellow garden she has planted a trio of *Macrocarpa* 'Golden Halo'. Clipped at different heights, they really stand out in winter. "I was never a huge conifer fan" she says, "but you can't go past them down here for winter colour and they're actually quite resilient to clipping."

Sally is happy to have no need for a large kitchen garden explaining, "Dad's amazing. He grows enough for the café and all of us too! But lawn mowing is something she really enjoys, saying "it gives me another perspective of my garden. I take in the vistas and make more plans while I'm pushing the mower around." She likes the results too. "When the lawns are mown it draws your eye away from the minor details – just like vacuuming the carpet!" she offers, adding with a laugh "I'm so pedantic about my garden!"

In saying that, she is working on the house too, doing up an old Dunedin Tram which forms part of the house. She saves the sanding and painting for winter, "when my garden doesn't need me so much."

Sally's garden enriches her landscape design expertise, providing her with an experimental base and seasonal reference. "When I'm designing other people's gardens I've got a palette of what's flowering at a particular time of year." She also sees the garden centre as an important part of her mix. "I love helping others choose the right plants for their gardens, and helping them inspires my learning too. It all intertwines."

To provide inspiration for customers the garden centre displays are a high priority, topped up every week and changed every six to seven weeks. It's another opportunity for Sally to play with plant combinations.

"It's not until you have your own garden that you realise how much you love gardening and how much you're prepared to put into it," she says. 🌱

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Sally's pictures of her garden show what she has achieved in just two and a half years.