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War of the Roses border

# STRIVING FOR PERFECTION

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**T**he truism that a garden is never fully completed has been repeated by the finest horticulturalists since Nebuchadnezzar issued his first instructions to the gardeners in Babylon. A design is put in place, with much attention paid to making its basic structure cohesive, ensuring the anchor plants are in flourishing good health and that form and colour engage the spectator's senses. Yet after all that planning and execution a detail is missing or misaligned or just plain wrong and the gardener notes the mistakes or misjudgements and determines that the next season will be another step on the road to perfection.

Only the notebook stays on the desk as another part of the garden is to be over-hauled or refreshed: a new woodland garden is to be laid out, the re-configuration of the peony garden is in need of adjustment, the High Border is stamping its prima donna foot and demanding attention. Then, suddenly –almost unexpectedly – the moment comes when there is time for fine-tuning, for tweaking and polishing an area which has nagged at the back of the mind for too long, and this is the stage we have reached in the War of the Roses border for our summer planting.

The spring displays of a variety of tulips,

wallflowers and forget-me-nots suit that lengthy space well, and the yew dividers and buttresses have now grown into the shape we imagined, giving room for more intricate planting in the midst of it and allowing us the luxury of concentrating on such detail. Last year we planted the central bay in a quite different pattern to its neighbours (a scheme flatteringly covered by *Which? Gardening* in its January issue) and this year we are expanding this notion into three of the 'rooms' in the central stretch by planting them with a selection of bold colours in the magenta spectrum from the prominent blooms of dahlias, zinnias and antirrhinums. Woven through them, matrix style, will be cosmos in softer shades of pink, *Ammi majus* with feathery foliage and white umbels, together with tall, airy eucalyptus and the small mauve flowers of *Verbena rigida*. In the other bays on either side we will repeat the combination of cosmos, eucalyptus and *Verbena rigida* so that the varying heights and differing forms flow through the intricate central space and into the next bays. All of which embraces the golden rule of garden design: varying height, form and colour.

In my mind's eye I see it perfectly, and we are determined (drought and flood allowing) to re-create that vision. We cannot guarantee perfection, gardeners are far from infallible, but at least we won't have Amytis of Media (aka Mrs Nebuchadnezzar) demanding that plants hanging from the roof of Paper Buildings are required as a backdrop.