



Roscoea 'Harvington Imperial' and *Codonopsis grey-wilsonii*



The flowers and fruits of *Roscoeia* 'Harvington Imperial', *Codonopsis grey-wilsonii* and *Arisaema nepenthoides* rising through the ground cover foliage provide the colour on this week's cover image however this is not the most floriferous time of the year in our garden as we wait for the autumn flowering bulbs to appear. However the trees and shrubs provide plenty of colour, shape and form as well as valuable habitat for the wild life.



Following on from last week's climate change theme I decided to take you on a walk with Molly, not round the garden but around the neighbourhood, looking at some of the front gardens that we pass by. Gardens play a very important part in the ecology and combined they represent a large chunk of the green spaces and bio-diversity in our towns and cities: they should be cherished - enjoy the following photo essay.



Even in a flat without a garden you can still grow a wide range of plants with some pots and dedication.





It seems to be a particularly good year for Hydrangea, which seem to be very popular around here, of course they do thrive on plenty of moisture and there are a lot of cultivars appearing in the garden centres.



It is often said that the colour depends on the PH of the soil with acid ground producing the best blues but I have always been sceptical of that as I do not see the evidence to back up that belief. I think it is much more to do with the variety because I am seeing many different colour forms in the same or adjacent gardens. For many years I have observed the plant on the left, which every year has both blue and pinky/purple flowers on the same bush. I do suspect that temperature can affect the hue of many blue plants with colder conditions producing more intense blues.



Apart from ours there are not too many gardens with trees in the front which is a great pity because I think they add great value to the neighbourhood both aesthetically and environmentally. I love this simple combination of birches and grasses.



I have always liked grasses and am pleased that in recent years they have become more popular in gardens however I am not so keen on the pampas grass, *Cortaderia selloana*, shown below.



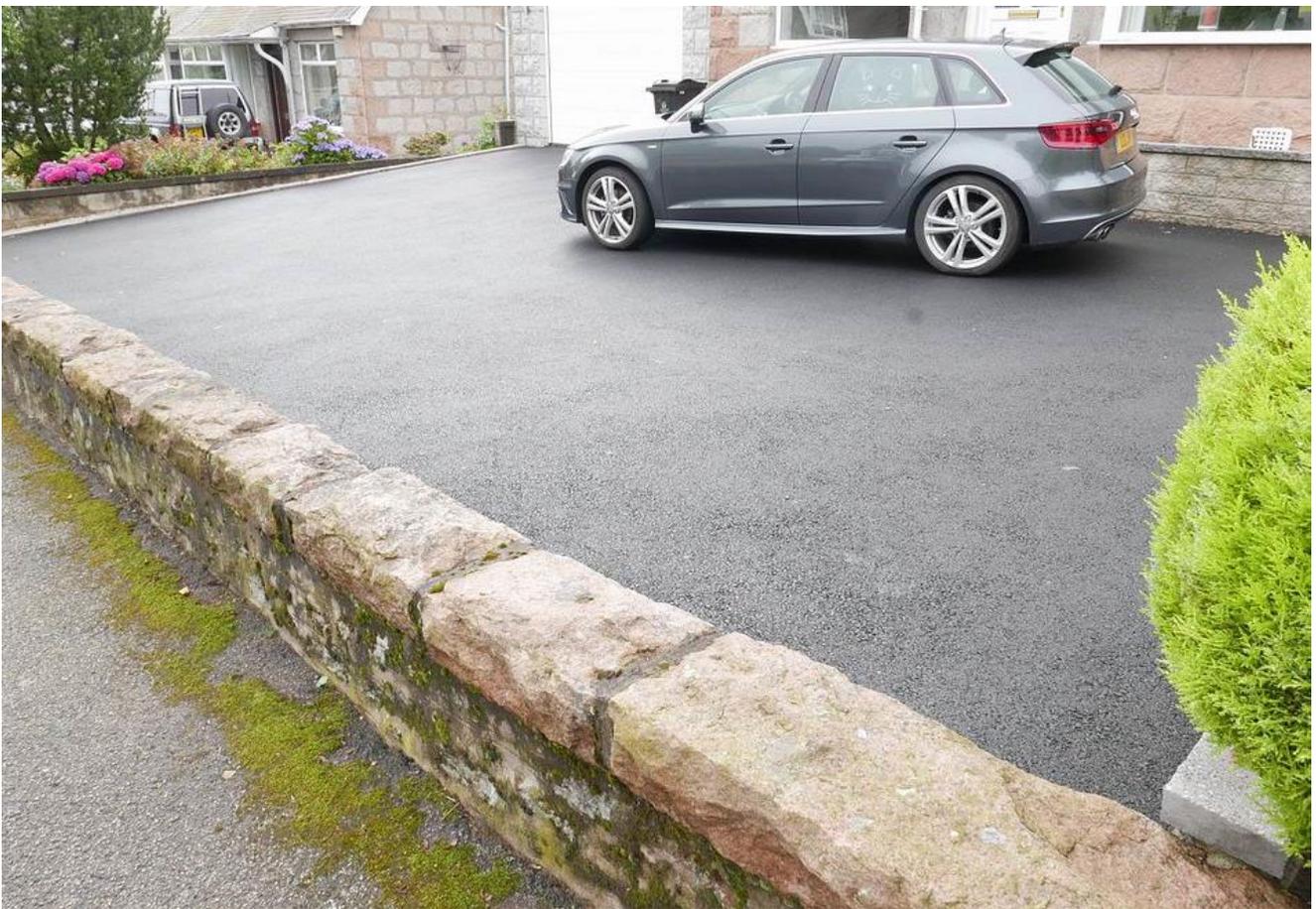
Cortaderia selloana is a striking plant but it needs a large garden or better still the South American Pampas to be in scale. It is also a prolific seeder and I am constantly seeing seedlings growing all around even in the gutters and cracks in the pavement where it can become a menace.



I am not such a fan of grass when it is a lawn but I do appreciate seeing them in other people's gardens and they also provide a feeding habitat for certain types of birds.



A very typical Aberdeen garden is a rectangular lawn surrounded by narrow rose beds which is odd because our summer weather is not always conducive to the flowering of roses.



I cannot imagine why anyone would choose, or be allowed, to cover their entire front garden in such an impervious surface as tarmac. I have to accept that not everyone is interested in plants; but tarmac?



At least covering your garden in gravel allows rain water to soak away slowly into the ground although I just have the overwhelming urge to start scattering seeds across this bare patch.



There is a very interesting combination of plants in this planting including *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, *Fatsia japonica* and *Hosta*, note the bicoloured *Hydrangea*.



Gravel can also be made more interesting with just a handful of plants and some decorative elements.



I like the idea of this mulch of pebbles in two sizes: it has a lot of promise but I would prefer to use the smaller pebbles to form a dry river bed meandering diagonally across the garden plus a more imaginative layout in the planting of the few shrubs.



This one works better with the curved shapes and contrasting beds.



There is a warning here that when you plant what looks like a small Hebe, it may even be sold in the alpine/rock garden section, and indeed they are relatively low growing but if left to their own devices they can spread out to cover a substantial size – almost 1/3 of this garden. I think this may be Hebe ‘Youngii’ !



Locbloc is very popular which is at least semi-permeable and in that aspect better than tarmac. When they cover an entire garden it looks to me like a garage forecourt.



There should always be a place to grow some plants in beds and/or containers.



Many will lay locbloc in the belief that it is easily kept but be aware that all those joints are crevices where moss and plants will grow. This very decorative layout looked fine for the first year then mosses and plants got a hold. Now mosses and weeds are starting to take over – it will take a lot of work to clear it of all this growth – I rather like the greening of the hard environment as nature starts to reclaim it.



Our cool moist weather also suits slugs and snails which are in great abundance this year - do not be fooled by the often given advice that surrounding your plants with gravel will deter them from feeding on your plants.



This neat well-kept garden is a good example how to combine dwarf conifers and heathers to give year round colour and interest.



A selection of bedding Begonia adds some seasonal hot colours to this evergreen scene.





While not my style of garden I appreciate the work involved in this garden which is full of seasonally planted bedding Dahlias which do not enjoy the cool wet summers that we mostly get.





Making a striking statement this line of Cordyline and large Dahlia are not plants I would choose.



Even if you do nothing plants will arrive: I rather like *Chamerion angustifolium*, a pioneering species also known as Rosebay Willow Herb or Fireweed.



This street planting used to be planted with Floribunda roses which required a lot of maintenance, never did very well and tended to gather litter; at last we have a more appropriate planting using a Birch tree and Hydrangea.





Turning into Molly's favourite lane where we both enjoy exploring the plants growing along the edges – note the many self-seeded pampas grasses.



Not all the garages are used regularly!



A currently fashionable green wall hides this garage door, the under planting includes a grasses and a Buddleia.



I regularly forage on the self-seeded raspberries and brambles.



If you ever wondered what would happen to your garden if you did nothing, here is a good example, that I have observed over many years. Before it was abandoned it was a back garden with a lawn which was taken over first by weedy species then the trees took hold and now it is turning into woodland.



The developing woodland has an understory planting – that sounds familiar.



Reminds me of home and now we are back in our front garden.



A woodland type planting with a varied sequential understory planting.



Codonopsis grey-wilsonii using **Arisaema nepenthoides** to gain some height.

No matter what your planting preferences are we need to value and protect all our gardens and not allow them to become personal carparks – there are many ways that you can have room for cars as well as plants.....