

COUNTRY LIFE®

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Why you need a cutting garden How to train roses to perfection



Going to

the Dogs



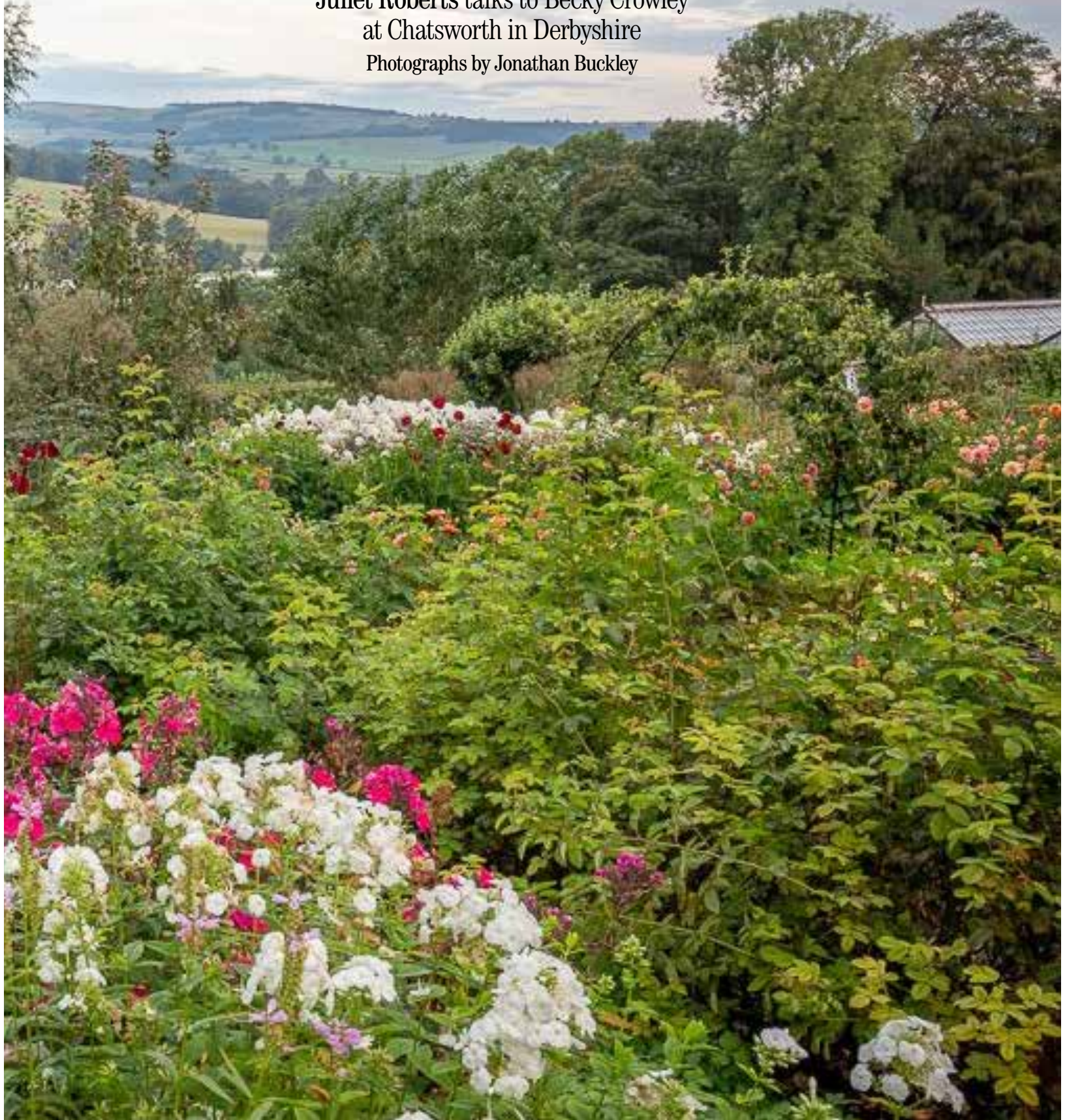
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Heseltine: my mistakes became my masterpiece Lady Godiva and King Arthur's dog Swing low, sweet chandeliers



A year of cut flowers

To find out how to fill your vases with
homegrown flowers from now until December,
Juliet Roberts talks to **Becky Crowley**
at Chatsworth in Derbyshire
Photographs by **Jonathan Buckley**





IT'S no mean feat to grow a year-round supply of gorgeous flowers and foliage, but to do so at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire requires more than meticulous planning. Becky Crowley, who took over the cutting garden in 2014, is an art-school graduate-turned-grower and the driving force behind what has become one of the finest cutting gardens in the country.

Not only must she provide enough year-round blooms for the three in-house florists to decorate the home of the 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, for use at events held at the property and to sell in the farm shop, but Becky also has to ensure the garden looks beautiful during the 10 months it is open. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and

‘I grow early-, mid- and late-season bulbs, tender annuals, shrubs, the whole lot,’

hard work are evident to visitors, as well as to her more than 46,000 Instagram followers. Becky's regular postings of beautiful floral compositions (which she sells on Etsy to raise funds for a local charity), her stacks of notebooks, obsessive search for new plants, not to mention the barrowloads of flowers picked by the florists, all point to the fact that, despite her relaxed nature,

she runs the garden like a military operation. With only part-time help from one to two volunteers during the busiest months and a student one day a week, there's a lot of work to fit in. Good planning is key.

The one-acre cutting garden, set within the three-acre kitchen garden, sits high up on a west-facing slope behind the old stable block. It has extraordinary views of the Peak District, but is vulnerable to winds whipping through, despite backing on to woodland and being protected by a shelterbelt of trees and shrubs.

The layout, which dates from the early 1990s, comprises numerous beds, averaging 23ft long and 3ft–4ft wide (the perfect width for harvesting). The soil has been well



worked and nourished, so needs little feeding. To ensure a succession of cutting material, Becky relies on a wide range of plants. 'I grow early-, mid- and late-season bulbs, hardy, half-hardy and tender annuals, biennials, hardy and tender perennials, shrubs and climbers,' she says. 'Basically, the whole lot.'

The season begins in March, with masses of *Anemone coronaria* followed by Ranunculus, and ends with chrysanthemums in December, all grown in the Victorian glass-houses on site. Outdoors, spring is heralded by daffodils and an abundance of tulips. 'We do tulips in a big way,' says Becky. 'Last year, we grew 75 different varieties and planted between 5,000–6,000 bulbs.' In summer, peonies, roses, lupins, delphiniums ►



Preceding pages and left: The one-acre cutting garden stands within three acres of kitchen garden. Above: The three Chatsworth florists gather *Hydrangea Annabelle* and other stems to make arrangements for the house. In spring, 6,000 tulips will come into bloom, followed by alliums and aquilegias, then, in summer, peonies, delphiniums and roses

Stalwarts of the cutting garden

Anemone coronaria

Flowering from late February until April, these have an excellent vase life, especially if cut just as the petals begin to open. I particularly like the dark, velvety petals of Mistral Blue, Bordeaux and Mistral Vinato

Ranunculus asiaticus

These come in a great range of beautiful colours, from soft pastel shades to rich bright orange and vibrant pinks, and each plant produces lots of stems, which is particularly handy early in the year. The Elegance range is really special

Tulipa

Tulips are best in their first year, so we treat them as annuals. Instead of cutting the stem when harvesting, we pull it up with the bulb attached, which gives an extra-long stem and a clear planting bed for the next crop. The double and parrot types are the most popular with the florists

Papaver nudicaule

Despite looking delicate, Icelandic poppies make great cut flowers, especially if harvested just as the buds start to open and if the ends of the stems are seared in boiling water for 20 seconds. I recommend

Champagne Bubbles and, if you can find seed, the Colibri strains for cutting

Paeonia

Peonies make superb cut flowers and have a long vase life. Their short flowering season renders them a bit of a frivolous use of space, but if you have a spare patch of ground, they're a real treat

Mint and oregano

Herbs add an unbeatable just-picked-from-the-garden scent and texture to an arrangement. *Oreganum laevigatum* Herrenhausen is a lovely darker version, although I like them all

Dahlia

Flowering from August until the first hard frost, dahlias are invaluable cut flowers. I particularly like the waterlily and collarette types and always grow dinner-plate-sized ones for fun, but the ball and pom-poms tend to have the longest vase life

Panicum Frosted Explosion

A beautiful, airy, annual grass that adds lightness and texture to the garden, pots and bouquets. I grow it from seed, and am delighted it has started to seed around





A calendar of flowers

and bearded iris are important crops; then, in late summer, dahlias take centre stage.

Plants grown from seed play a major part in the garden and, each year, Becky puts in about 150–180 different varieties, for which she has developed a finely tuned timeline for sowing: hardy annuals in late summer into autumn; then half hardies in March and April. ‘My aim is to avoid potting on. I start seed in modules, then, when plants are big enough, they go straight outside.’

Timing is crucial, as ground often needs to be cleared to make way for new plants. In May, it’s annuals (when summer bulbs are also planted), then, in June, it’s biennials and perennials. ‘April, May and June are crazy busy,’ she laughs. ‘In early summer, we’re not only putting plants in, but also taking plants out, as well as keeping on top of weeding, deadheading and maintenance.’

In September and October, Becky pre-germinates *Ranunculus* indoors, then plants spring bulbs between October and November. The final sowing is sweet peas, which is started in a warm greenhouse before Christmas before the flowers are put in cold frames outdoors. ‘That way, I get tough, healthy little plants rather than leggy things that need pinching out.’

‘It’s not only the clever choice of plants and timings that sets this garden apart’

Becky grows numerous trees and shrubs for blossom, berries, foliage and stems. Some of her favourites include *Physocarpus diabolus*, dark hazel, *Ribes sanguineum*, paniculata hydrangeas and lilacs that, although not ideal cut flowers, are useful for that inbetween period around May. The estate’s florists also love the immature fruits of raspberries to add texture and a certain wildness, as well as herbs, especially mint, oregano and rosemary. ‘Anything scented helps bring the garden into the bouquet.’

Ornamental grasses make useful fillers, especially *Stipa gigantea*, *Calamagrostis brachytricha*, *Brisa maxima* and the annual *Panicum elegans* Frosted Explosion. ‘The florists seem to just eat the Panicum, but, happily, it’s self-seeded everywhere.’

It’s not only the clever choice of plants and timings that sets this cutting garden apart, however. The practicalities and maintenance are brilliant, too. One of the first challenges—rabbits—was overcome with the installation of ungalvanised weld mesh

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January (grown and picked around the site)

- **Mahonia** (November–February)
- **Hamamelis** (December–March)
- **Viburnum x bodnantense Dawn** (October–March)

February to March (planned and grown in the cutting garden)

- **Anemone coronaria** (under glass February–March)
- **Helleborus** (February–April; for floating in water or for seed pods later)
- **Iris reticulata** (February–March) and **snowdrops** (January–March) in terracotta pots (in cold frames)
- **Papaver nudicaule** (Icelandic poppies grown under glass March–April)
- **Ranunculus** (under glass March–April)
- **Daffodils** (March–May)

April to May

- **Tulips** (April–May)
- **Alliums** (May–June)
- **Aquilegia** (May–July)
- **Astrantia** (May–August)
- **Bearded Iris** (May–June)
- **Biennials such as foxgloves** (May–July), **Anthriscus sylvestris Ravenswing** (May–July), **honesty** (May–June, but also for seedheads in autumn), **sweet rocket** (May–June) and **wall-flowers** (April–May)

- **Camassia** (May–June)
- **Fritillaria imperialis** (April–May)
- **Ranunculus** (started inside, then placed outdoors; April–May)
- **Cerinth** (late May–June)
- **Lily of the valley** (May)

June

- **Achillea** (June–September)
- **Feverfew** (June–September)
- **Biennials, such as Daucus carota Dara** (June–August) and **hollyhocks** (June–September)
- **Hardy annuals, such as Ammi majus** (June–September), **Calendula** (June–August), **Eschscholzia** (June–September), **Malope** (June–September), **Orlaya grandiflora**, **Salvia viridis** (June–September) and **sweet peas** (June–September)
- **Herbs, including mint, oregano and rosemary**
- **Hydrangea paniculata Vanille Fraise** and **Limelight** (June–August)
- **Lilium regale** (June–July)
- **Lupins** (June–July)
- **Paeonia** (June–July)
- **Philadelphus Belle Etoile** (June–July)
- **Roses** (June–October)

July

- **Campanula** (July–September)

- **Delphinium** (July–August)
- **Foeniculum vulgare** (July–September)
- **Hardy annuals, such as cornflower** (July–September), **Gypsophila** (July–August) and **Nigella** (July–September)
- **Half-hardy annuals, such as Cosmos, Rudbeckia hirta, Amaranthus** (late July–October)
- **Helenium** (July–October)
- **Hydrangea arborescens Annabelle** (July–September)
- **Phlox** (July–September)
- **Zinnia** (July–October, indoors for long stems)
- **Amaranthus** (July–October)

August to October

- **Gladiolus murielae** (syn. *Acidanthera murielae*; August–October)
- **Dahlia** (August–first frosts)
- **Sunflower** (August–frosts)
- **Cosmos** (August–frosts)
- **Rudbeckia** (August–October)
- **Gladioli** (August–September)
- **Cobaea scandens** (August–October)
- **Selenium wallachianum** (August–September)

November to December

- **Chrysanthemums** (under glass)
- Visit www.countrylife.co.uk/gardencalendar for Becky’s Calendar of Tasks

fencing. ‘It took two winters to put it all in, but it completely solved the problem.’

Weeds were also a massive issue, tackled by laying down a thick straw mulch on pathways and beds. ‘It’s been incredible. Not only does it suppress the weeds, but it retains moisture and the soil is now full of life.’ However, together with the worms, came the slugs. ‘For the moment, it’s not a problem,’ explains Becky, who generally takes a sanguine approach to damage by wildlife. ‘The florists don’t need every single flower, so as long as we put in more than enough plants, we can share everything.’

One of Becky’s key pieces of advice is to stake well and stake early. She uses several methods, such as birch twigs, poles and brush, and grids of wooden posts (3ft tall,

pushed 16in into the ground) topped with hemp netting for plants to grow through. The aim is to support the first third of a plant to stop it flopping. ‘There’s a big difference between a characterful wiggle in something that’s obviously garden grown and something that’s got an elbow and is unusable.’

Becky is part of a new generation of gardeners combining the best traditional practices with the power of the internet to research and talk to other growers around the world.

‘What interests me most is seasonality. Flowers picked from the garden mark a particular moment you won’t get again for another year. Piecing together those moments over the year is my job—and I love it.’

Becky has just left for a new role on the Floret Flower farm, Washington state, US