



# A touch of frost in the Borders

Words and photography by Bill Tait

**Bill Tait takes us on a personal tour of Carolside, a hidden gem of a garden in the Scottish Borders**

*F* heading south down the A68 road from Edinburgh, one could almost be forgiven for missing the house nestling in the valley below. It is a scenic stretch of road, overhung by beech trees, bright green with their fresh unfolding leaves in springtime and with delightful tints as autumn progresses. The eye can be so taken by the colour that it is difficult to keep watch for the traffic speeding around the corners up ahead.

Carolside is situated beside the east bank of the River Leader upstream from Earlstoun, Berwickshire. It has been the home of Rose and Anthony Foyle for 14 years. No records exist of when the house was originally built, but it possibly dates back to the mid-1700s and the present house may have been built on the site of previous dwellings. It faces south-east, a short distance from the river, which makes a lazy 'S' sweep down the valley. Although a veritable suntrap in the



PREVIOUS PAGE

*Leucojum vernum* are undeterred  
by the cold conditions

THIS PAGE

*Azalea*, *Fritillaria Imperialis* and *Narcissus*  
all thrive in the garden at Carolside

OPPOSITE PAGE

The striking delphinium border under-  
planted with blue geraniums



summer, it's a frost pocket in winter as frost lingers in the valley bottom for longer, presenting challenging conditions for the gardener.

Rose Foyle is an extremely knowledgeable plantswoman and her main passion is, unsurprisingly, roses. Her passion stems from an early exposure to roses by her grandmother who she says "absolutely adored them and was keen to point out different varieties, giving them names and encouraging me to smell their scents." She has collected and assembled a large number of shrub roses, which are hardier than hybrid teas and floribundas (which are large and cluster flowered and prone to frost damage) in this cold garden. Groups of three roses of the same species and cultivars are planted on either side of the curving paths, with the intense fragrance of the centifolias, moss, gallicas, rugosas and other sorts filling the air in mid-summer. There are also some climbing and rambling roses trained to walls and in the foyer *Rosa banksiae* 'Lutea' produces dense clusters of delicately scented yellow flowers that combine well with an intensely fragrant white-

flowering *Jasminum polyanthum*.

Whether winter decides to recede or not, trusty snowdrops are the first plants to emerge from their hibernation. *Crocus tommasinianus* clothe the ground followed by large carpets of daffodils, which enliven the scene with their golden yellow flowers. Bluebells, witch hazels (*Hamamelis*) and the common hazel (*Corylus*) all flower almost simultaneously along with the Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), densely covered with its clusters of yellow stamens. On this and other shrubs, tussocks of lichen grow, indicating the purity of the air and the high humidity of the area. Both old and newer varieties of rhododendrons display their large clusters of flowers and recently, a collection of lilacs has been planted.

In a triumph of nature the seemingly barren soil of winter plays host to a wide variety of herbaceous perennials, which grow extremely well, enjoying the rich, fertile and loamy soil and producing bounteous swags of flowers during the summer months. Rambler roses scramble up poles and along chains, providing a backdrop to the borders, and additional





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height is supplied by a large arch over which are trained more roses and wisteria. The latter flowers freely each year, proving that even in such a climate, wisterias will thrive. Peonies appreciate the heavy soil and are covered in bloom in June, while delphiniums underplanted with blue geraniums take prominence in borders near to the glasshouse. The stately spikes of the delphiniums stand like a platoon of sentries guarding the crops of vegetables and soft fruit in the plots behind them. In addition, Rose has an area set aside for plants to produce cut flowers for the house; another plot

contains small gardens where her two daughters and son are encouraged to enjoy the delights of growing and maintaining plants.

Foxtail lilies (*Eremurus*), thrust noble spikes of creamy flowers high into the air whilst below them *Alstroemeria* 'Ligtu' hybrids create a vibrant splash of colour with their pink and orange shades. Although severely damaged by a  $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$  frost one winter, an *Abutilon vitifolium* var. *album* recovered to produce once again great inflorescences of pure white flowers in early summer. Cuttings are taken most autumns just in case of disasters and

the plant receives some protection from the nearby greenhouse. This policy is one adopted for many of the plants and shrubs in the garden. Rose says, "Sometimes the frost is so severe you can see a line of destruction right through the garden where the wind has blown, so we need to take cuttings of penstemons, lavender, rosemary and other plants if we want to guarantee their presence in the garden next year"

Rose has planted a pink and blue garden outwith the main garden, but also enclosed by walls. Climbing and rambling roses are trained to the walls interplanted with clematis: a delightful





MAIN PICTURE

The view looking south shows the herbaceous border in all its glory

INSET

*Acer Palmatum* provide dramatic colour in autumn



combination. In the centre an elliptical bed has been planted with bushy roses and edged by catmint (*Nepeta*), a useful and hardy perennial that provides most of the blue colour. White-flowering *Philadelphus* and *Hydrangea* help create a restful refuge to be enjoyed whilst sitting under a bower of fragrant *Lonicera periclymenum* 'Belgica'.

Flowering plants are an integral part of this garden but there is still

room for more practical elements. The herb garden has four triangular beds edged by box and some herbs grow so vigorously that annual thinning has to be carried out. In the glasshouse a green fruiting grape fruits prolifically. A fig tree also produces succulent fruit every year (the distinctive aromatic foliage reminds the writer of childhood days living on a large estate where figs grew in abundance). Ancient espalier apple trees, which still fruit profusely,

and flowering cherries abound and as age takes hold, younger trees have been planted to succeed them, an insurance for the future. In locations where they can receive more sun are plums, damsons and greengages.

A number of borders contain plants appreciating shade. In early spring, snowflakes (*Leucojum vernalis*) and snowdrops (*Galanthus*) are the harbingers before Lenten roses (*Helleborus orientalis*) hybrids,





ABOVE

A light dusting of snow on the formal beds

RIGHT

Carolside nestling in its frosty pocket

FAR RIGHT

Peonies show their appreciation of the heavy soil by blooming profusely



lungworts (*Pulmonaria*), *Cardamine pentaphyllos* and aquilegias hold sway. Martagon lilies and yellow and brown crown imperials (*Fritillaria imperialis*) appreciate the conditions here, as do various hostas; some have purple shoots that pierce the soil before they unfurl decorative leaves. *Viburnum x bodnantense* is the main winter-flowering shrub, producing many clusters of scented pink flowers close to red-stemmed *Cornus*. One of the dogwoods is the bright yellow foliage form 'Lutea', which illuminates its shady corner.

The delightful fragrance from the pink-budded yet white-flowered *Viburnum x burkwoodii*, a semi-evergreen shrub, pervades the air near its spot by a door leading into the garden. Trained to the wall the pale blue flowers of *Clematis* 'Perle d'Azure' contrast attractively with the pink roses in front of them. *Actinidia kolomikta*, a twining climber bearing heart-shaped green leaves liberally splashed with pink and white blotches, is nearby; during early summer, small sweetly scented white flowers are hidden below the foliage. Another surprise is provided by the presence of the trifoliate evergreen *Holboellia coriacea*, a vigorous climber from western China. It is an achievement to grow pampas grass despite the severe frosts, but camellias have been tried without success. It's a struggle to keep plants such as *Cistus* alive but *Philadelphus*, *Deutzia* and *Mahonia bealei* thrive in the sunny borders. Tall

*Allium giganteum* with their round purple inflorescences make an eye-catching display, as do bright yellow tulips a little earlier in the season.

Several laburnums have been planted with a view to training them into an arch; when in flower they contrast well with the large copper beech tree near by. Vibrant flowering azaleas have been planted in a bed in this area, which can be viewed from the house.

Autumn in the garden brings colourful fruits on various rowans, spindles, *Euonymus* and *Malus*. Leaves of azaleas, berberis and viburnums and especially an *Acer palmatum* cultivar vie for attention with their host of tints and shades. These colours are reflected in more muted tones by the trees on the hillsides around the valley overlooking the garden.

Although gardening at Carolside is a challenge there have been many successes to compensate for the occasional failure. It is a tribute to the determination of the owners not to be deterred from having a beautiful garden whatever the elements might throw at them. ○

Bill Tait is currently a horticultural adviser with Dobbies and a former supervisor at RBGE

Carolside is open most years under Scotland's Gardens Scheme and by appointment only at other times.