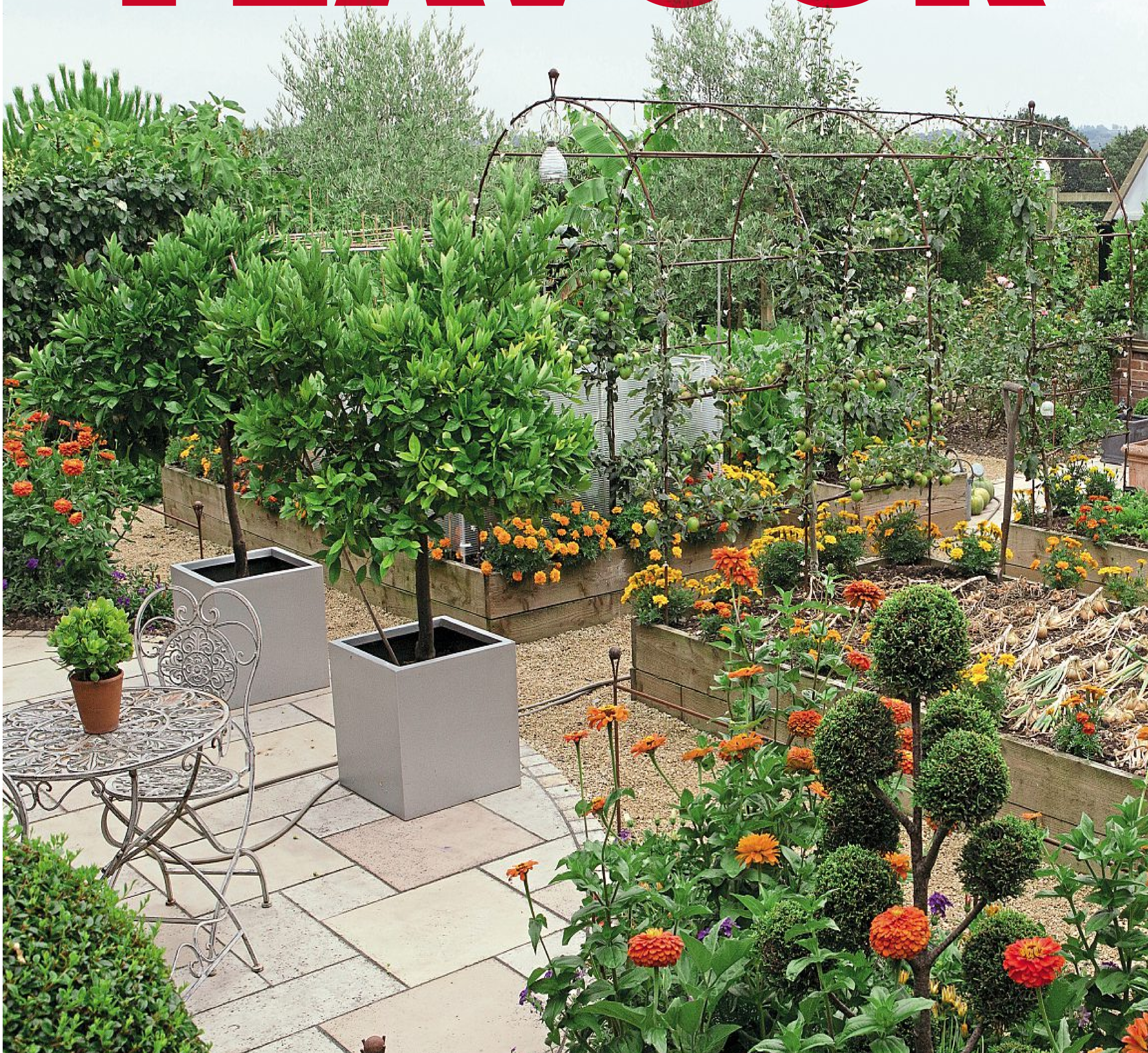


A GARDEN WITH AN
**ITALIAN
FLAVOUR**



Garden photographer and writer **Leigh Clapp** was given a tour around a decorative and highly productive potager inspired by the owners' Italian roots



Former work colleagues Tony (left) and Adam share a passion for gardens, design and exquisite food

Adam Vetere took me on stroll around his immaculately cared-for potager at his home in Headley, Hampshire where he lives with his wife Heidi and son Luke. He explained that his inspiration for the garden came from his summer holidays in Italy.

“My father is Italian and we used to spend our summer holidays on my grandparents’ farm in Piedimonte Matese, near Naples, Italy. My time there watching my grandmother prepare wonderful dishes with just the veg and meat from the farm inspired me to reproduce the same growing conditions.”

They were initially attracted to their Hampshire home by panoramic views of Watership Down from the south-facing slope and the fact that the existing house was on the site of a Roman camp and bath house; there has been an array of changes, on a tight budget, since they moved to Old Camps in 2007.

“The house wasn’t easy on the eye, but was a great footprint to design a contemporary home from, complete with an atrium! The design of the garden evolved from the design of the new house, though I did design new cottage beds in homage to the original house. It was important to keep a link with the past as well as looking into the future,” Adam comments.

GARDEN REDESIGNED

The existing garden consisted of a basic knot garden, a vegetable garden, a few cottage beds and the majority was laid to lawn, as well as a hornbeam hedge that separated the upper and lower gardens that were partly terraced. Adam, who originally worked as a landscape designer and contractor before going into financial design, has now returned to his passion for designing gardens, with the journey in his own garden allowing him to experiment and express his interest in a broad range of styles and concepts. “My design inspiration comes from my travels to the four corners of the world, visiting gardens and the natural habitat in varying climates from desert to tropical, assimilating garden design ideas, theories and variations on new planting schemes that can be used in future designs,” he adds. ➤

This was Adam's first large-scale site to work on and one of the initial tasks was to get to know the micro-climates in each area of the plot. Working from a plan he initially drew up, the garden has evolved into areas that are linked together to form a cohesive whole, but with plenty of unexpected and exciting ideas and planting to enjoy. "I like to design gardens that challenge what is naturally accepted in this country. My time in some notable Italian gardens, such as Boboli in Florence and Reggia di Caserta, has pushed some of my design towards a more formal style, as symmetry and balance were key to the classical gardens of Italy and wider Europe. However, I would say my current style is a mix of modernist, contemporary and new perennial, which allows me to fuse flowing perennial schemes with strong geometry," he says.

The one-acre garden now has traditional herbaceous borders, Mediterranean and desert beds, prairie planting and ornamental grasses, an exuberant exotic border, potted lemons in a sheltered al fresco dining area, as well as the decorative potager. The design complements the strong lines of the house as well as vignettes being considered from looking down over the garden from the balcony or with glimpses to draw you through the landscape as you wander. "For me it's all about interest leading through the garden on to something else, a voyage through the garden," Adam adds.



ABOVE: The contemporary house overlooks the potager with its abundance of crops

LEFT: Adam uses French marigolds to deter whitefly

BELOW: Espaliered apples 'Golden Delicious', 'Cox's Orange Pippin' and an unknown variety from Adam's grandmother's garden, are trained on the arch that divides the space

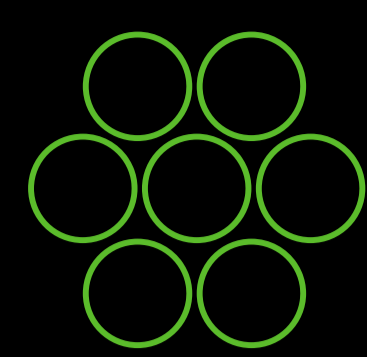
BELOW RIGHT: Adam enjoys growing a wide variety of crops, including aubergines 'Rosa Bianca' and 'Black Beauty', 'San Marzano' and Italian 'Red Pear' tomatoes, 'Goccia d'Oro' and 'Marconi' peppers, purple and green basil



ORGANIC GROWING

At the heart of the garden is the potager, abundant with organically grown crops in a carefully thought-through design. The site needed to be levelled, a large south-facing wall was built to create a warm micro-climate, four rectangular raised beds were added, and a large glasshouse positioned at the southern end, lying symmetrically across the central axis of the rectangular design. Over the central axis a path through the beds is further defined by a contemporary arbour clad in espaliered apples and leads to the focal point of an ornate lion's head fountain in the wall and a semi-circular patio, a lovely place to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee in the morning sun. At the edge of the site, fan-trained and further espaliered fruit trees are underplanted with fruit bushes and woodland planting to take advantage of the dappled light they created. "The layout had to be symmetrical and allow the ability to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers in a stylish environment. I always look to maximise the growing environment, creating sun traps, warm walls and allowing the cold to drain in winter which allows you to grow a larger range of vegetables and grow them earlier. I would estimate that the micro-climate is probably now akin to the middle of France," he comments. ➤





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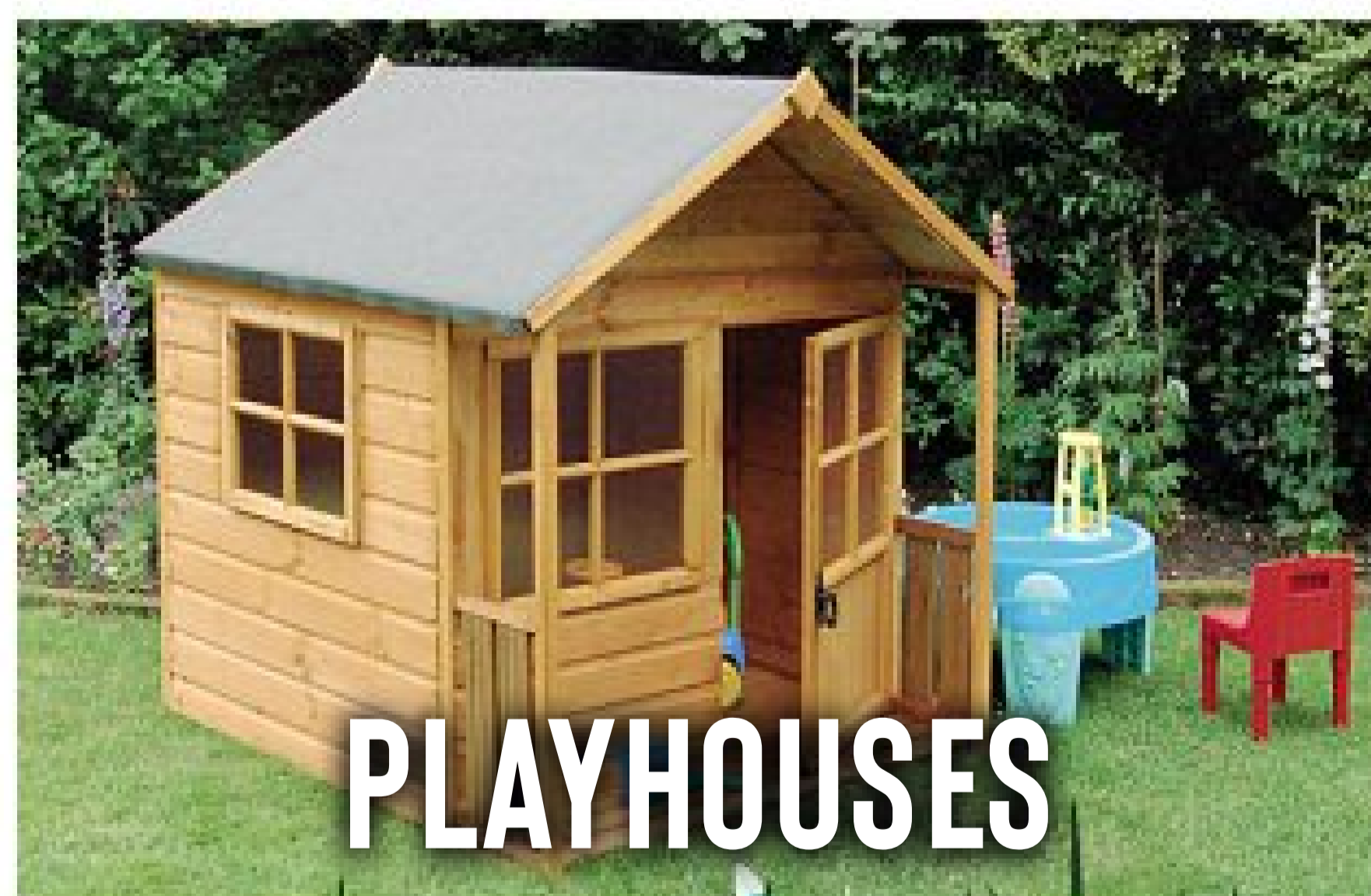
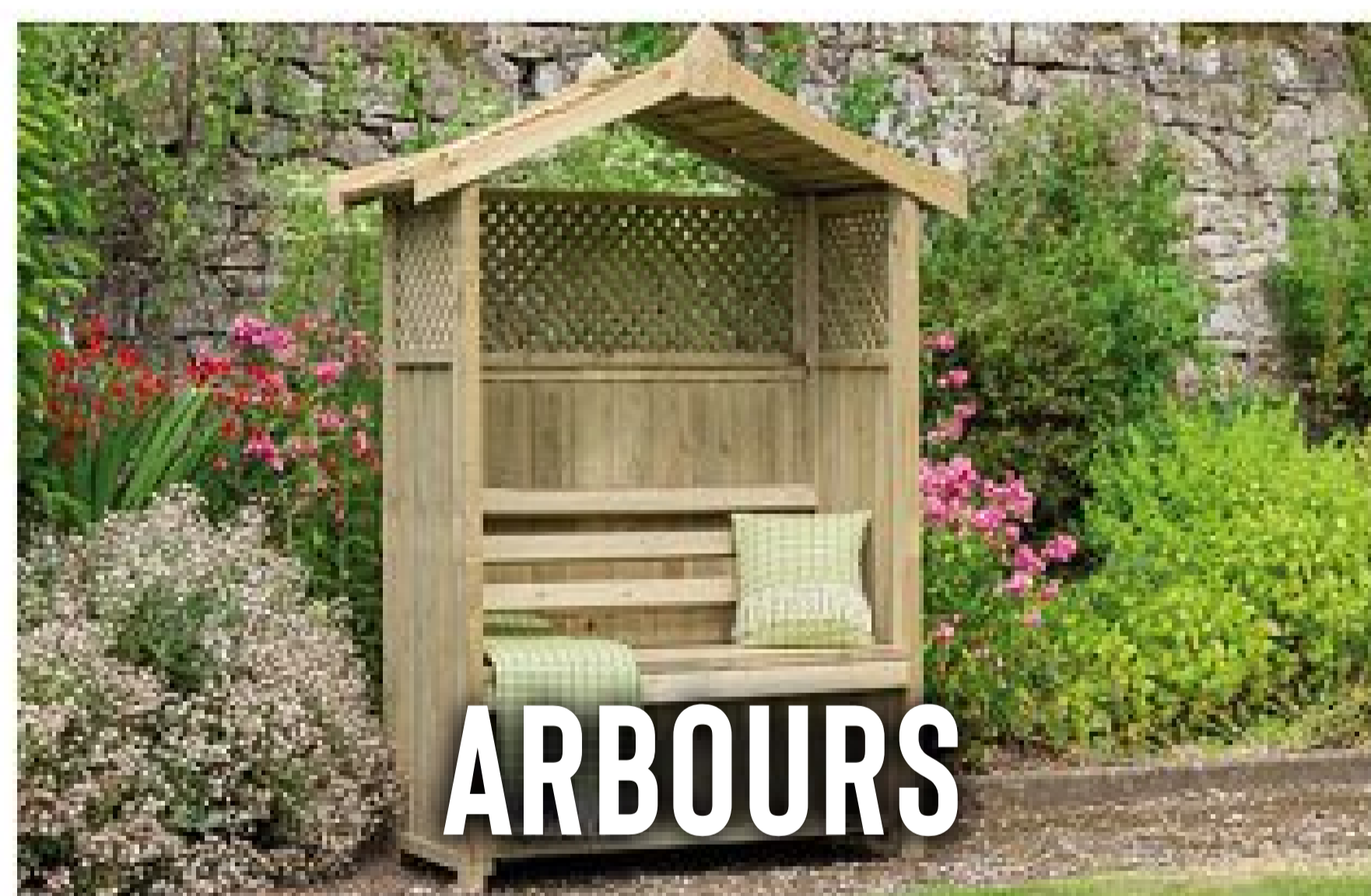
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The planting is equally considered, often mirroring the formality of the lines with rows and matrixes, which also helps with pollination. “I always like to add geometric shapes, again symmetrically, especially in the vegetable beds, which are then raised to aid drainage and the warming of the soil in the spring. Plus it also helps with your back!” Adam smiles. Companion planting is key to the productivity, along with yearly rotation. Many of the crops are selected because of Adam’s heritage and love of cooking Italian dishes, including particular favourites such as ‘San Marzano’ tomatoes, ‘Violetta Lunga’ and ‘Black Beauty’ aubergines, ‘Romanesco’ courgettes, ‘Red Marconi’ peppers, along with a plethora of herbs, nectarines, peaches, figs and melons. “The Italian cooking that I’m familiar with is more peasant style ‘paesano’, simple, extremely tasty and of the highest quality. The key is the quality of the produce and only use what is in season – you need to work with the climate and nature, as there should be no carbon mileage with this style of cooking,” he explains.



ABOVE LEFT: The larger courgette flowers are best for stuffing and the closed blooms are good for frying

ABOVE RIGHT: A potted bay and vintage watering cans with a mixed summer harvest make an attractive vignette

LEFT: Adam grows a variety of different onions, including flavoursome ‘Red Baron’

FAR LEFT: Freshly picked ‘San Marzano’, ‘Crimson Crush’, Italian ‘Red Pear’, ‘Indigo Sun F1’, ‘Ruby F1’ and ‘Golden Sweet Cherry’ tomatoes

BOTTOM LEFT: A pair of Seville orange trees on the patio area, later they will be overwintered in the glasshouse from November to March



Cooking with friend and former work colleague Tony Casillo, a passionate amateur chef and cookery book author, is a particular joy, sharing both an interest and new ideas. “I’ve known Tony since 1995 when I joined Elliott Turbomachinery. I was promoted to finance director in 2002 and worked alongside Tony, who was the vice-president for Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) until late 2005. In this time we travelled all over the region (Middle East, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and into Europe, both north and south), chatting about food, design and gardens. We would often go to our site in Italy together and I would always drive back to the airport.

“Tony always asked if we could stop at the market and he would then produce an empty soft bag from his suitcase which he would then proceed to fill, so that he could prepare some wonderful dishes when he got home, later that day. We’d always be late for the flight and would end up having to rush through immigration,” Adam recalls.

Tony then went on to become CEO and president of the company until 2011, when he retired, and the pair have kept in constant communication, sharing ideas and thoughts, and were enjoying a day in the potager when I visited, harvesting and cooking the produce immediately for a delicious lunch. Try out the deliciously simple recipes on the next page to enjoy the Italian flavours of high summer.

GARDEN OPEN

Old Camps garden is open through the Yellow Book National Garden Scheme on August 3 and 4 (10am-5pm)

- www.ngs.org.uk
- Visits by arrangement, June 1 to September 30
- Tel: 07720 449702
- Email: gardens@oldcamps.co.uk
- www.oldcamps.co.uk



“The taste you create from fresh vegetables is completely different from a British supermarket’s fare”

Tony’s wife Carol, Adam and Tony enjoy the tastes of the season

ADAM’S TIPS

■ It’s important to grow fresh organic produce that inspires you to want to cook; to stop and think about what you could do with it – that’s the key. It has to draw you in and get your creative juices flowing, which you can then transfer to the plate. Though, above all else, it has to be fresh – it must have ripened naturally, in the sun, allowing the flavours to fully develop. The taste you create from fresh vegetables is completely different from a British supermarket’s fare.

■ Good suppliers of seeds – for me, Franchi Seeds of Italy, www.seedsofitaly.com, are the best and they have a wonderful range from which to choose. Johnsons Seeds also do a good range, see website for stockists, www.johnsons-seeds.com

■ The longer varieties of pepper and aubergine are great in southern England, such as ‘Red Marconi’ and ‘Goccia D’Oro’ peppers and ‘Violetta Lunga’ aubergine. You need to grow the plum tomatoes – ‘San Marzano’ which make great salads and passata (pasta sauce).

■ Use a south-facing site, create a warm micro-climate and start vegetables in plugs in a greenhouse. Bring out once all frost has passed. Work with nature and the seasons – never against it. If it is a cool summer, consider using perspex screens around your plants (especially peppers and aubergines) to create a mini micro-climate.

■ You do need a greenhouse to succeed in the cooler summers, as you can effectively have two crop cycles.

■ Companion planting with marigolds and basil limits airborne attack and thus our reliance on chemicals.

■ Oregano is picked and dried for use for the rest of the season. If we have additional basil, then we create pesto. ■

TONY CASILLO’S RECIPES

STUFFED TOMATOES

- 8 tomatoes
- 500g ground beef
- 1 cup pecorino romano, grated
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 4 slices unsmoked bacon, chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 2 tps basil, chopped
- 2 tbsps oil
- Salt, pepper

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 180C (350F)
2. Cut tops off tomatoes and reserve
3. Using a small teaspoon, scoop out seeds and core from each tomato, set upside down to drain
4. Combine the filling ingredients and fill the tomatoes
5. Position the tops like hats
6. Put tomatoes in an oiled roasting pan
7. Bake for about 40 minutes, until filling is cooked through



TOMATO BRUSCHETTA

- 6 slices crusty bread
- 1 clove garlic
- Olive oil
- Salt, pepper
- Tomato
- Chives
- Basil

METHOD

1. Toast the bread under the grill on both sides
2. Rub the clove of garlic on each piece
3. Drizzle with oil, add salt and pepper
4. Return to the grill and brown until golden
5. Chop tomato into small cubes, discarding seeds
6. Mix in a bowl with chopped chives, chopped basil, salt, pepper, a little olive oil
7. Spoon the mixture on the bruschetta