





PHOTOS OPPOSITE: Derik Fell; inset: J. Barry O'Rourke

GARDENS

A Profusion of Flowers

Robert L. Green's Farm in Pennsylvania

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DERIK FELL AND J. BARRY O'ROURKE

AS AN EXPONENT of one of urban life's ultimate artifices, that of high fashion, it might seem a contradiction for Robert L. Green to espouse the joys of country living and the delights of gardening. He is a style and fashion consultant to many major publications and manufacturers, and he designs

To his own surprise, noted arbiter of fashion and taste Robert L. Green became an enthusiastic gardener after he acquired *Tollgate Farm* in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. ABOVE: A view of the Main House is framed by willow trees; swimming pond is edged with lilies. OPPOSITE: Daffodils above the pond arrange themselves in a natural swirling pattern.

clothing and much else. But on reflection a certain logic presents itself.

After all, a garden is a composition that is refined and elaborated from a natural base. And so is fashion. A talent for discerning harmonies in fabrics can be extended into the reaches of the floral world, and an understanding of proportions must surely be echoed in the laying out of a garden.

"Let me say that it came as a great surprise to me, when I bought *Tollgate Farm* in 1963," says Mr. Green. "I'd never planted a seed in my life, and I had no idea that the sixty-five acres I

acquired with the house would turn me into a complete garden addict.

"By pure coincidence, my first weekend guest was Vivien Leigh. She was an avid gardener, you know. She took one look, and said 'Robert, you must have an English perennial garden.' I roared with laughter and said, 'What you don't understand is that I have enough to do, just figuring how I'm going to meet the payments on the farm—without worrying about having a garden designed.' 'You can do it yourself,' insisted Vivien, and soon she was reeling off lists of very complex

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and medical-sounding Latin names.”

Like many budding gardeners, he started off with packets of seed. “Then, when I began to realize that the results were somewhat random—to say the least—I began to do what I always do when a subject fascinates me: I bought books, and I read about it. I soon found, however, that books give a good deal of sound advice, but are rather repetitious. I was ready for the next step, which turned out to be nurseries. It was about then that I became fascinated with it all.”

Mr. Green is proud of the ever-increasing scale of his activities—beginning with his perennial garden, blossoming out into a formal rose garden, and finally erupting into the massed displays of daffodils, irises and munificent varieties of day lilies. These flowers take up an ever-increasing acreage on Tollgate Farm, and they have even begun to make Mr. Green’s name a familiar one among the garden fanciers of Bucks County.

“I definitely do not belong to the group that thinks a garden should be a kind of floral military school,” says Mr. Green firmly. “I don’t like flowers that stand to attention. Flowers should look as though they were on a marvelous outing—rather than engaging in some rather hostile activity.”

He does, however, have decided views on the appropriate floral mix.

“Certain flowers are gracious and polite,” he says with the delicate air of a court chamberlain deciding precisely who is—and who is not—eligible for presentation. “Others have bad manners, and several are distinctly nouveau riche. Then there are the shy ones, dear little things, like baby’s



OPPOSITE PAGE: 1. A Chinese-style pavilion, designed by Angelo Donghia, offers a place of rest at one end of the Rose Garden. 2. Masses of daffodils border a wooden bridge that spans a stream. 3. The Rose Garden is outlined with Japanese maples and star magnolias. THIS PAGE: “Certain flowers are gracious and polite,” says Robert L. Green. “Others have bad manners. Really, the principles are the same as those you apply to a party. Planning a garden is very much a matter of bringing the right personalities together.” Some of his choices include: 4., One of a wide variety of roses; 5., *Gloriosa* daisy; 6., *Imperial Gold* hybrid lily; 7., *Rudbeckia*; and 8., *Country Cousin* day lily.

breath, who need gentle companions. Really, the principles are the same as those you would apply to a decent party. Planning a garden is very much a matter of bringing the right personalities together in harmony.”

Naturally Mr. Green is aware that there is more to planning a garden than inviting the “right people.”

“There are lots of flowers that simply don’t work in Pennsylvania, anemones for instance,” he says. “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been taken in by a supposedly tough new strain guaranteed to survive in the East. They never do! The things that do work beautifully include phlox, delphiniums and columbines. So I try to be satisfied with my successes, rather than think longingly of the impossible. Not a bad maxim to extend to the rest of one’s life, either.

“Another extraordinary thing about nature is the daring, clashing colors she can wear—and get away with! There are combinations that would be a disaster, were they to be worn by humans. But here they look fabulous.”

It was to roses that Mr. Green turned his attention after completing his perennial garden: “I wanted to try a somewhat more formal composition, you see. And my idea of formality is symmetry. So I planted four Japanese maples and four star magnolias, and draped my roses around them.”

There are many other delights to be gleaned from gardening, of course.

“Flowers become one’s children,” he says. “They are a responsibility and a joy. And eventually, when you start seeing the progeny of your own blooms in other people’s gardens, you realize that you are a grandparent! As your garden grows, your fertilizer bills begin to approximate the national debt. You become a proselytizer, and skirt the edges of becoming a bore. Finally—and perhaps this is the most satisfying—you do develop a reputation as a garden person.”

What finally seems to give Robert L. Green the keenest pleasure of gardening is, however, the simple process of growth: “I was terribly impatient at first, I wanted everything to open up, blossom at my command. Now I’ve

PHOTOS BY J. BERRY O’ROURKE







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J. Barry O'Rourke

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LEFT AND TOP PAGES: Derek Fell

learned patience, and can wait whole seasons for results. I find that the garden has become the perfect excuse

PRECEDING PAGES: "Another 10,000 daffodil bulbs can do wonders for one's mental health," confides Mr. Green. THIS PAGE: 1. A view of the barn and stables across a field of daffodils. 2. Stone steps lead from the meadow to the corral. 3. Lilies and daffodils border a slope to the pond. 4. Tom, Toppett and Chaos are Tollgate's horses. OPPOSITE: The Tollgate hybrid daffodil.

for giving myself presents, if I've been good. Ten thousand daffodil bulbs can do wonders for one's mental health."

Also, Mr. Green feels that he may have made a certain contribution to science: "I think it's highly likely that flowers can understand English. Last year, I arrived at my house on a Thursday night, to get ready for my annual Sunday opening of the garden and grounds for Goodwill Industries. The

garden just wasn't *doing* anything.

"Well, I went out into the garden and spoke very solemnly to the flowers. 'All right, ladies, I want to tell you right now that you have a responsibility. On Sunday we will be open for a charity. People are going to be paying to see you—and I want you to look gorgeous.' And, you know, by Sunday there was a most ravishing display!" □

—David Halliday

