Garden design solutions:

A GARDEN FOR CHANGE @KNEPP

by Ian McBain



I recently made the trip down to West Sussex to visit the 'rewilded' walled garden on the Knepp estate. The Knepp project has been well documented in recent years, as the 3,500-acre estate is transformed from a loss-making arable farm into one of the UK's leading rewilding experiments.

Whilst Knepp's roaming herds of cattle, ponies, pigs and deer are the main attraction for many visitors, it was the more recently reimagined walled garden that was of greater interest to me. In what was once a formal garden with a croquet lawn and swimming pool, the walled garden is now a haven for a rich variety of plants and insects. This, in turn, attracts a plethora of small mammals and birds, and has created a garden which is as beautiful as it is inspiring.

Perhaps most striking of all, however, are the topographical changes. Previously a broadly flat and level space, huge quantities of crushed brick and concrete were used to sculpt and completely transform the garden. This has created the 'lumps and bumps' more typical of natural spaces, and a complex mix of damp and dry, sunny and shaded. With this range of conditions, more than 1,000 species of plants and over 400 different species of insects are now thriving in the garden.



The use of crushed brick and concrete is key, because the vast majority of plants are planted directly into this rather than more traditional topsoils. These 'harsher' growing conditions necessitate deeper root systems, and so the plants are more resilient in our changing climate. It was gratifying to learn that the garden had not been watered throughout this year's record-breaking summer, and yet the planting was still looking superb in late September.

The walled garden at Knepp will inevitably continue to evolve over the coming years, and while most of us won't be looking to try to fully recreate it in our own gardens, there are definitely ideas that we can adapt for a more domestic scale.

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