



Drifting along to happiness

Richard Pim spent his career travelling to the world's driest spots, then came home and created a tranquil landscape of water, populated by a wealth of moisture-loving plants ▶

PHOTOGRAPHS JANE SEBIRE WORDS DAVID WHEELER

The Big Pond, with a rope bridge to the island, is flanked by planting of *Hosta sieboldiana*, *Hosta 'Golden Tiara'*, *Primula pulverulenta* and *Rodgersia podophylla*.

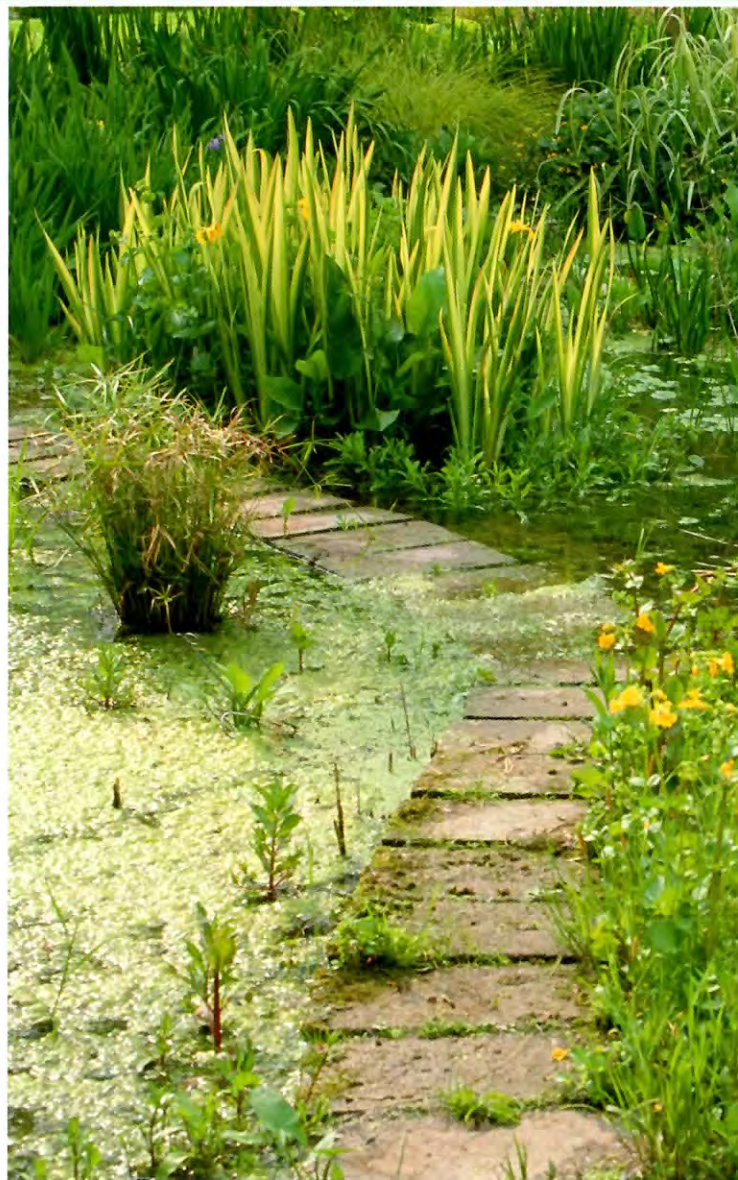


The watery world of Westonbury, a glistening two-acre oasis set among the regimented cider orchards of north-west Herefordshire, is a veritable haven for aquatic plants and animals. Paradoxically, it is also the passion and plaything of a retired hydrogeologist, whose working life was spent looking for water in some of the world's most arid places.

Richard Pim bought the derelict 18th-century mill in 1969 and embarked upon its piecemeal restoration while maintaining a busy professional life overseas. Only in 1998 did he begin to make a garden and utilise the abundant flow of the Curl, a brook that rises from springs in the nearby village of Lyonshall.

Richard is a 'doer', a gentle giant prepared (and able, it seems) to turn his hand to any task - the wetter and muddier the better. With JCB and dumper truck, he first excavated the Big Pond, a third-of-an-acre sheet of water with depths ranging from half a metre (18in) to two metres (7ft) - 'good for swimming in', he muses. Its island, fringed with *Carex pendula* and reached by a fragile-looking rope bridge, was intended as a refuge for ducks, although they mostly choose to ignore the sanctuary it offers. Plentiful underlying boulder clay prevents water seepage and helps to reinforce the embankments, although Richard has 'lightened' it with sandy loam here and there to improve growing conditions for some of his marginal plants.

The many tonnes of spoil have gone to building





TOP View across the bog garden to the Tower, an area planted with blue *Iris sibirica*, red campion and golden iris. **FAR LEFT** Paths weave through the bog past *Mimulus luteus* and *Glyceria maxima* var. 'Variegata'. **ABOVE** *Iris sibirica* 'Perry's Blue'. **LEFT** *Trollius chinensis* 'Golden Queen' and red campion.

a brookside dyke, a long rampart doubling as a boundary and a raised walk that allows for elevated views across the garden.

A mini-digger was used to create the bog which, with skilful use of several sluices, never dries out. In summer, it rustles like some ethereal aquatic savannah, where waves of grasses and sedges sing in the breeze. How, I wonder, is it maintained? How are the unruly clumps of vigorous plants held in check? 'I get in there in my waders,' Richard says, 'using the small boat as my wheelbarrow.'

As Richard developed the garden, he dug rills and other watery sites (traversed by an assortment of bridges and stepping stones), using the spoil imaginatively to raise ground levels where he wanted plants that prefer drier feet. One such mound now bristles with conifers and a collection of deciduous shrubs and small trees.

But it is the mass effect of flowering plants that so captivates the visitor to Westonbury. In their season, accumulations of glowing perennials energise the scene, masking those marginal zones where water and dry land meet. Gone in spring, summer and autumn are winter's bare lines of demarcation. In their place, swirls of colour ebb and flow: marsh marigolds intermingle with *Primula denticulata* and the stubby pink heads of darmera; *Iris sibirica* stands shoulder to shoulder with the striking skunk cabbage spinnakers of *Lysichiton americanus* and *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*. Many more wet-loving primulas have also settled in ▶



TOP Behind planting of *Primula wilsonii* and *hemerocallis* is the African Summerhouse. **ABOVE** A blue wave of *Iris sibirica* 'Perry's Blue' in the border. **RIGHT** *Geum rivale* 'Album'. **LEFT** Paths through the bog garden allow a good view of individual plants

well, including *Primula pulverulenta* and *Primula japonica* 'Miller's Crimson', as well as *Primula bulleyana*, *beesiana*, *wilsonii* and *florindae*.

Richard has a great fondness for native plants, allowing free proliferation of campion, wood anemones, *Fritillaria meleagris* (snakeshead fritillary) and such water champions as *Iris pseudacorus*. Hostas thrive, but with slugs a pest in such a damp place, I marvel at their luxuriance, prompting Richard to reveal his clever wheeze - he offers them *ligularia*, which the slugs seem to prefer.

Gunnera, giant rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*) and *rodgersias* add jungle effects as the seasons advance; a carnival of daylilies (*hemerocallis*), *astilbe*, *filipendula* and *crocosmia* take over from the springtime performers, while Japanese anemones, lofty *eupatoriums* and vivid *lobelias* blaze their way through late summer into autumn. It sounds like Eden, but beware the snake, visiting mink, otter and heron that make it impossible for Richard to keep his ponds stocked with fish.

As a contrast to all this water, Richard is 'cultivating' a wildflower meadow, introducing as much local flora as possible by scattering quantities of seed-rich hay obtained from farming neighbours. The garden's several follies have each been built by Richard from mostly



recycled materials. The steel pergola drips with 'Rambling Rector' roses, and his African Summerhouse - of an 'ethnic' appearance to chime with his past working life abroad - is built from elm poles growing along the brook and thatched with his own thuggish bulrushes.

The Tower, which can douche unsuspecting visitors with 40-gallon spurts of water, carried aloft by buckets rising on a belt system driven by an old water wheel, is built from stone rescued from the Judge's Lodgings in Hereford, and its three gargoyles were carved by Richard from Forest of Dean sandstone.

His latest folly is a sci-fi-looking dome to house ferns, made from some 5,000 cemented-in wine bottles of several colours. We don't discuss the consumption of the bottles' contents, but I can't help feeling they have somehow heightened Richard's impish sense of humour and perhaps encouraged some of his wilder concepts.

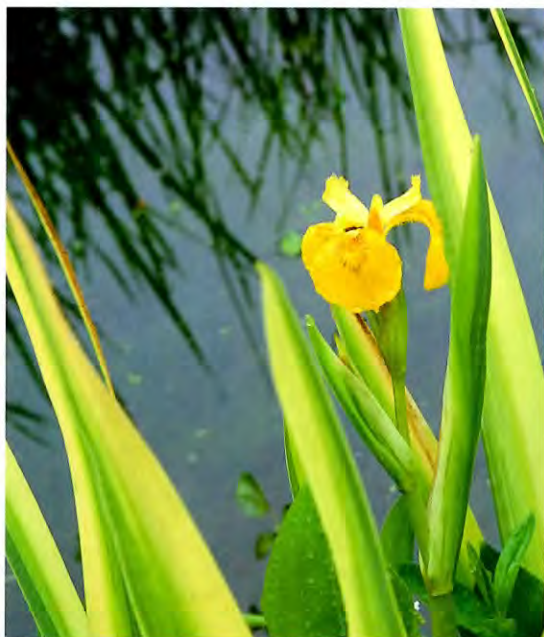
Westonbury Mill Water Gardens, Pembridge, Herefordshire HR6 9HZ. Open until 30 September, 11am-5pm. There is a café for visitors, serving morning coffee, light lunches and afternoon tea. Tel: +44 (0)1544 388650. www.westonburymillwatergardens.com

Turn over for garden notebook ▶



Garden notebook

Richard Pim's two-acre garden is fairly flat and laid out around the streams and ponds behind an old corn mill. The soil is slightly acidic



EDGED IN GOLD

This beardless iris, *Iris pseudacorus* 'Variegata' is suitable for the margins of large ponds, lakes or other wet places. It has beautiful golden foliage, which looks particularly good in spring, and it grows to about 90cm (3ft). Irises are among the most attractive of the bog plants, and very easy to grow.

STRAW AND TWIG

Geum rivale (right), also known as water avens, is a good plant for bogs and wet meadows, with a pretty nodding head, which produces red flowers from May to August. If you are looking for plants for your own bog garden, try Bennetts Water Gardens in Dorset, tel: +44 (0)1305 785150. www.waterlily.co.uk



HITTING HOME

Hostas flourish in Richard's garden as shown by the healthy, and hole-free, colony of *Hosta fortunei* (left). In this water garden slugs tend towards the very wettest areas, meaning the many varieties of hosta are left alone.

OWNER RICHARD PIM'S TIPS



- **Containers can be used** to help restrict the spread of invasive plants. Alternatively, small sections can be compartmentalised by building retaining walls below the surface of the water.
- **Seedheads and the previous year's growth** can be left over winter to provide food and cover for wildlife. This also helps to increase stock of self-seeding plants where required.
- **Elm and alder are two water-resistant timbers** that can withstand long-lasting wet

conditions. Both are ideal for durable structures set in water. Many elm trees that suffered Dutch elm disease re-grow for several years before succumbing again, and can provide useful building materials for the water garden.

- **If any pesticides or insecticides are used, read the labels clearly** to ensure their suitability and safe use in water.
- **Lighten margin areas of clay** by incorporating sandy loam to improve the growing conditions for plants that dislike their roots in heavy mud.

CONTACTS

LOCAL GARDENS TO VISIT

- **Hergest Croft Gardens**, Kington, Herefordshire HR5 3EG. Open daily, 21 March-2 Nov, 12-5.30pm. Tel: +44 (0)1544 230160. www.hergest.co.uk
- **The Stockton Bury Gardens**, Kimbolton, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0HB. Open 1 April-1 Oct, Wed-Sun & BH Mon, 12-5pm. Tel: +44 (0)1568 613432. www.stocktonbury.co.uk
- **Hampton Court Gardens**, Hope-under-Dinmore, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0PN. Open 22 March-26 Oct, (closed Mon & Fri), 11am-5pm. Tel: +44 (0)1568 797777. www.hamptoncourt.org.uk
- **Croft Castle**, Yarpole, nr Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 9PW. Open 19 March-31 Oct, Wed-Sun, 11am-5pm. Tel: +44 (0)1568 780141. www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- **Berrington Hall**, nr Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0DW. Open to 2 Nov, Sat-Wed, 11am-5pm, tel: +44 (0)1568 615721. www.nationaltrust.org.uk