

A photograph of a traditional thatched-roof gazebo situated in a lush, green garden. The gazebo has a conical roof made of dried reeds or straw, supported by several wooden posts. It is surrounded by dense foliage, including various green plants and flowers. Sunlight filters through the trees in the background, creating a warm, dappled light effect. The overall scene is peaceful and idyllic.

# WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

TIM LONGVILLE pulls on his waders to explore  
the pools and idiosyncratic streamside gardens  
of Westonbury Mill, Herefordshire









**(Previous page) The African Summer House: a touch of the wild in the garden's bottom corner. (Above left) An atmospheric path winding back towards the house through an archway of living willow. (Above right) The castellated water tower**

ONE of the joys of gardening,' says Richard Pim gleefully, 'is that there's no one to tell you what you can and can't do.' And, he adds, with even more glee, that his own lushly planted, three-acre water garden, decorated with idiosyncratic architectural eye-catchers, has been created from a basis of 'pure ignorance—but perhaps that's been a help, as I had no idea of the possible pitfalls'. In fact, of course, creating such a garden from scratch in only 10 years, with all its earthworks, waterworks, architectural works and plants by the thousand, would have been impossible without considerable knowledge, energy and commitment. Because for the first 10 years, he did it all himself, 'although now, I have someone to help with the weeding—and a new wife to help with the garden around the house!'

Mr Pim bought the disused Westonbury Mill, near the village of Pembridge in the Herefordshire

countryside, back in the 1960s, when it was somewhere to bring his children for holidays. He was a hydrologist then, often working abroad for years at a time, 'so anything I did here had disappeared under weeds by the time I came back'. It was only 10 years ago that he returned permanently, 'but I'd always loved the place, and always thought that, because of the clay soil here, you could easily make a good garden round the stream and the mill leat'.

This horticultural *agent provocateur* quickly adds: 'Really, the views out to the meadows and the hills are so wonderful, you hardly need a garden.' All the same, a garden he has—and an extensive, intensively planted and extremely coherent one at that, although he claims that it has evolved 'as a series of barely connected ideas. One thing just led to another'.

All of its major watery and architectural elements have been created by Mr Pim himself, although his self-deprecatory professional comment is: 'This isn't big engineering—it's simply having fun.'





Those elements are: first, a bog garden made from what was once the mill pond; second, a newly made pond, of considerable size, complete with island; third, a second bog area, with water channels acting as 'dividers' between its three large beds; fourth, a combination of spinney and conifer-planted mound, made from an old orchard and edged by yet another (cleverly diverted) rivulet of water; and fifth and—until recently—last, extensive beds created next to the old mill leat. Paths meander through and between all of those areas, with occasional architectural eye-catchers to focus attention on vistas down or across the garden.

Of the eye-catchers, the most prominent is a stone-built water tower. When the big mill wheel by the house was removed, the people who owned it at the time installed a smaller wheel by the stream, to pump water to the farm. Later,



**Who's this? Doves cluster around Mr Pim's caricature of himself**

Mr Pim acquired enough Forest of Dean sandstone to build a castellated tower, up the outside of which mini-buckets haul water. The water is deposited in a tank within the tower, then ejected from the mouths of the tower's three gargoyles. All were carved by Mr Pim, and, although two are just 'ordinary' gargoyles, the third, over the doorway, 'was meant to be a caricature head of me, but something went horribly wrong. A visitor once asked: "Why have you put Brezhnev up there?"'

Next, on the far side of the garden, between bog garden and big pond, comes the fern house. Incomplete at present, this is a dome made out of curved concrete 'spars,' the gaps between them filled with thousands of multi-coloured empty wine bottles. 'This is Herefordshire. I've got teams of willing helpers to empty them for me.'

Finally, the third main eye-catcher, in the bottom ➤





**The Martians have landed: the otherworldly, empty-bottle fernery gleaming green beside the main pond**

corner of the garden, beyond the small pond-cum-bog and looking back across the garden towards the house, is what Mr Pim calls the African Summer House. It's open-sided, with uprights out of 'raw elm' (from regenerating saplings in his boundary hedges), and its roof is thatched with bullrushes from the pond, 'although that was a bit of a mistake—they only last two years'.

Mr Pim is happy to divert people's attention from his planting to his pieces of fun, but the planting is effective, well planned, and sometimes distinctly unusual. A good example is the two-sided hedge arching around one side of the water-channel-divided bog garden. One side consists of variegated dogwoods *Cornus alba* *Elegantissima*, the other of the *rugosa* rose, *Roserie de l'Hay*, and for once, Mr Pim confesses: 'That's something I'm very pleased with.'

Given the size of the garden, its maintenance—

**Ponds are for boating, but this is boating with a serious purpose—Mr Pim often gardens from his 'aquatic barrow'**

done largely by Mr Pim himself—and the rumbustious nature of most moisture-loving plants, 'planting here is mostly of big, bold plants in big, bold blocks'. Hence the garden's swathes of *Darmera peltata*, for example. 'People are always talking about architectural plants, but this is a wonderful engineering plant,' says Westonbury's resident water engineer, 'ideal for reinforcing the banks of a stream.' And there are similar swathes of *Gunnera manicata*, *Filipendula camtschatica*, various *rodgersia* species, *astilbes*, *hemerocallis*, irises, and of impressively hole-free hostas. 'When people ask how I manage it, I tell them: "Grow ligularias and they'll eat those instead."' More seriously, he adds: 'I don't plant the hostas in the really wet places—and those are where the slugs tend to congregate most.' However, as well as those large and audacious herbaceous plants, the garden also includes both tiny treasures, such as drifts of reddish-purple *Primula wilsonii*, and a discriminating selection of trees, such as *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, *Alnus glutinosa* *Imperialis* and *Acer palmatum* *Katsura*.

And one final impressive aspect of this engaging new garden is that all of its lushness has been created by his own hard propagating work, whether by division or seed, as his proud boast is 'I only ever buy one plant of anything'.

*Westonbury Mill Water Gardens, Pembridge, Herefordshire. The garden is open daily from April 1 to September 30, from 11am to 5pm. There are plants from the garden for sale and homemade food in a cafe made out of a handsome converted wooden garage. For more details, telephone 01544 388650 or visit [www.westonburymillwatergardens.com](http://www.westonburymillwatergardens.com)*  
*Photographs: Val Corbett.*