



How to create your own Psalm 23-inspired garden

There are just four basic steps to creating your own Psalm 23-inspired garden.

1. Water

Water adds a sense of relaxation and tranquillity to any garden, however small or large. It's a real pleasure simply to sit and listen to the sound of the water, and watch the light on its surface.

And, of course, water attracts wildlife. Animals and birds will come to drink. Create the right habitat and you may get frogs, newts and a world of insects including damsel flies and dragon flies.

You can incorporate water in many ways, perhaps digging a rill, a pond or a fountain.

But a cheap option, costing you around £50, is to buy a wooden half-barrel from a garden centre.

Once you've added the water, place water plants in the barrel. You can plant them in plastic baskets. But what we've done, is to tie our water lily to an old brick with string. This will keep it weighted down.

Remember to use special pond soil if you use the baskets, as normal top soil is too rich for use in water. It will just cause a layer of duck weed to form on your beautiful pond...and you probably don't want that!

If you have a very limited budget, take an old water butt and cut it in half. Tape up the tap hole and line it with disused plastic. Old plastic sacks will be just fine. Take this option and you'll have a lovely water feature for next to nothing.

It won't look as lovely as a half-barrel, so this is a pond you sink into the ground. In either case, if you want to attract wildlife, you'll need to place your barrel in the ground.

Dig a hole to fit and place the barrel inside. You can blur the pond's edges by laying stones around it, or even adding a few plants that like growing by the water's edge, such as lilies or astilbe.

To help wildlife, add stones and soil not only around the edges, but build a ramp inside the pond from the bottom to the rim, to enable animals and creepy crawlies get in and out.

2. Meadow

Britain has lost 97 per cent of its meadowland since the Second World War. With it have gone species of insect and butterfly that are not only part of our heritage and co-sharers of the environment, but also create the start of the food chain.

So, in creating your Psalm 23 garden, why not incorporate a small area of meadow and help redress the balance?

You could put up a chalk board and ask people to write down what wildlife they see every month. This will get people really interested and engaged. And it will help you see the difference the meadow area has made.

An area of meadow will add movement and texture to any landscape. Just imagine long grasses blowing in the wind, and immediately you'll start to feel more relaxed.



Creating an area of wildflower meadow will bring in wildlife. Watch out for the Meadow Brown, Marbled White and Large Skipper butterflies, as well as Golden-Ringed Dragonflies and grasshoppers. But a multitude of bugs, spiders and even the odd shrew will appreciate the long-grass habitat.

Grass from our normal British lawns is pretty tough stuff and it makes it hard for wildflowers to get a hold. So, there are a couple of options you could follow.

First, take up the turf and lay wildflower turf in its place. St John's Church in Winchester did this, creating metre-wide strips of wildflowers on either side of the church path. This instantly created a link between the road and church, and dealt with the problem of tough grass.

The vicar, Revd Christine Smith, said, 'Gardens, and churches, are places of restoration. The doors of St John's have been open for more than 900 years. The wild flower garden made the welcome we offer more visible and gave pleasure to the whole community.'

The church received a grant from a local supermarket to do the work, so the only cost was in time and labour.

Churchgoers were joined by lots of people from the local community, who were keen to get their hands dirty and create a beautiful shared space.

'It was a wonderful day. Since then, we've had so many lovely comments about the garden. People love it,' said Christine.

'I'd really encourage other churches to do something similar.'

The second option is simply to let an area of your existing grass grow and see what comes up through it. St John's Church also did this alongside its wildflower turf borders. They found dog violets, rare orchids, horse daisies, cowslips and buttercups all flourished. These attracted not only bees, but butterflies and moths, which hadn't been seen there when there was just grass turf.

If you take this option, then add in some wildflower pockets to break up the grass. What flourishes will depend on your soil and aspect, so know both of these before you go plant shopping! Are you in shade on chalky soil, or in sun on clay? Which way does your plot face?

A really good plant to introduce, however, is yellow rattle. It is a parasitic plant and lives on the thatch of the grass. So, it reduces the grass sward and makes space for wild flowers to seed themselves and get established.

And for a spot of colour and a bit of a summer flourish, you could add Rosa Rugosa, a wild rose. This will create a bit of height, textural difference, and be attractive for bees and other pollinators.

Areas of meadow are easy to maintain. Mow them once everything has flowered and the seeds have set and dropped. Gather up all the mown grass. If left, it will enrich the soil, and wildflowers do best in poor soil. So, add the clippings to your compost heap instead. Or, if it's safe to do so, use it as hay.

If you are putting in plant plugs, or laying wildflower turf, remember to keep them watered while they establish themselves, unless you are planting in autumn or spring. Even then, it's worth keeping an eye on the weather.

Finally, it's lovely to walk through (or even lie down in) a meadow, so cut some paths through the long grass during the summer to let everyone enjoy the space. Children can run and play. Adults can stroll through more gently.

You can do this with a strimmer. But if you don't have one, a pair of shears and a bit of hard work will get the job done just as well.



3. Seating

Providing a seat in your garden enables people to relax and stay a while.

At St James' Church in Finchampstead, many benches are placed around the church grounds. People come to spend time quietly thinking about their loved ones who are buried there. Others meet to chat, simply because it's a beautiful place to be.

St John's Church in Winchester is on the Pilgrim's Way. The bench in its church garden allows pilgrims to stop and rest. But it's used just as much by mums and their small children stopping on the long walk up the hill on which the church stands, and other local people who bring flasks of tea and sit and look at the beautiful view.

So, the most important thing to remember when putting a seat in a garden is that it needs to have a view.

Look around at the options, decide where you'd like to sit and put the bench or seat there.

There are lots of options for seating. If you're doing this at a church, you'll need to be sure what is permitted.

But, in the main, the restrictions are about what you can afford. You can buy a new bench of course. If that's too expensive, look at what resources you have available. If you have recently cut a tree down, can you use the trunk as a place to sit? Could you cut this up and create a rustic bench?

Want a bench for free? You might find some pre-loved garden seats at your local recycling centre. Or look on recycling sites such as Freecycle, Gumtree and Facebay.

4. Tree

Every garden – no matter how small – can have a tree. It creates a focal point for the eye, gives shade, lifts your eyes through giving height and brings in wildlife. This will create the illusion that your space is bigger than it is, as the tree creates a visual bridge between your garden and the environment around it.

The Psalm 23 garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show demonstrates what can be done with one, impactful tree.

The garden itself was only 10m square (30ft square), the size of many a back garden. But the dramatic use of a tree transformed the garden.

'It's a tree that begs you to stop underneath it,' said designer Sarah Eberle.

So, you may want to think about having some seating under your tree too!

Look around you to see what kind of trees do well in your local area. Again, this will be about the type of soil you have and the aspect of the land you're planting on.

Then think about what you want that tree to do. Are you planting one tree as a focal point? Or, do you want to plant a hedge of native trees? Or, do you fancy growing a mini-orchard?

Like Britain's meadows, orchards have also suffered, with 90 per cent being cut down since the Second World War. But it takes just five fruit trees to create an orchard, so we can all help change that.

St John's Church in Winchester followed up its wildflower planting by adding apple trees that are native to Hampshire.



'We hope that everyone will enjoy spending time in the garden and eating the fruit, when the trees are big enough to produce a crop,' said the Revd Christine Smith.

If you're thinking about only planting one tree, buy something that is native and will do well in your conditions.

Consider the space you have. Do you have enough room to start a mighty oak that generations in the future will enjoy? Or, do you want something smaller like a rowan, which will give you beautiful berries in the autumn?

The best time to plant a tree is when it's dormant, during autumn and winter. Dig a hole large enough to more than accommodate its root ball. Add some well-rotted manure or compost to give it a good start. Don't give it too much manure, just a bit to allow a good root system to be established.

If you can, shake some mycorrhizal fungi onto the roots. These effectively extend the tree's roots, enabling it to gain more nutrition from the soil, and so, to settle and grow where it has been planted. More roots on your tree means they can take up water better. Don't forget to water your tree regularly if you are planting between February and September.

There's a great option on trees, if you are planting your own Psalm 23-inspired garden. We are working with our friends at the Woodland Trust. The Woodland Trust wants to make sure that everybody in the UK has the chance to plant a tree, so it's giving away hundreds of thousands of trees to schools and communities who want to plant on publicly-accessible land.

Its packs come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Create homes for wildlife, or brighten up your view with year-round colour. Harvest fruit and nuts or grow your own log burner fuel. Whether your plot is big or small the Woodland Trust has the right pack for you.

Apply now at woodlandtrust.org.uk/freetrees

Follow these simple tips and you too will have a wonderful basis for a Psalm 23-inspired garden.

Reflect

After you've done your gardening, why not take a few minutes over a cuppa to reflect on what Psalm 23 means to you as a group, a reflect on your gardening day? Use our handy resources: psalm23garden.co.uk/reflections.

We'd love to know how you get on with your Psalm 23-inspired garden. So, send us your pix and stories from the garden that you create in your community to: garden@biblesociety.org.uk.



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