

THE PASSIONATE GARDENER

As temperatures fall and the stunning splashes of summer colour are fast fading from her garden, Burton's **Sandra France** is already planning next year's display. And you can bet it won't be looking at all the same in 2007. Sandra – who can only be described as a passionate gardener – will be busily switching the whole thing around, varying its structure and colour schemes.

She and her husband Nigel live surrounded by a series of highly attractive plantings in their garden sheltered by substantial lengths of Burton's famous yew hedges. Last season's front-of-house show of pink geraniums and white petunias hanging almost to the ground became almost legendary in the village.

Sandra probably grows around 5000 plants each year. Clumps of dahlias and phlox, pink, red and white geraniums, astilbe plumes, lupins, nigella, clematis, camellias and sweet peas growing in pots to cleverly disguise the greenhouse. You name it, Sandra has it in her garden. "It's a bit of a mish-mash because I like all sorts of things," she says. "I call lots of plants after the friends who gave them to me and I like to plant pots of everything so that they can be moved round wherever and whenever there's a gap."



And this is a garden where wildlife flourishes too. Sandra refuses to use poisonous sprays and saves the seed pods of anything and everything to propagate more and more plants. "Some have fantastic seed heads in winter and the birds love it," she says.



The generously proportioned garden surrounding the house was all down to lawn when the France family arrived there in 1989. Sandra soon changed that, however, and shapely curves were introduced long before their daughter Victoria celebrated her wedding there eight years ago.

Despite acquiring a three-year training at Riseholme College of Agriculture and Horticulture, where she won several trophies for her creativity, much of what she does is purely instinctive. Where a plant is missing – or if she considers there ought to be more vivid colour in a particular spot - she'll simply slot in a potted plant to fill the gap. Sandra also loves to use "structural" plants such as Verbena bonariensis, Acanthus and Echinacea to give interest and height to her borders.

So when Spring comes round again, Sandra will be out working in her garden at first light. And as her plants come into flower, she'll be dead-heading every single day to keep an on-going display of bloom. A competent cook, she grows beans and tomatoes in pots. "I don't see it as hard work," she says "The garden is where I chill out."

Her photographs – yet another talent possessed by this highly creative lady - tell their own story.

