

Notes on the Garden: The East Court

Beautiful wrought iron gates frame what is now the entrance to Packwood House, giving tantalising glimpses of an elegant garden within. The warm brick of the garden walls and the 17th century office and stable wing with its iconic sundial, all combine to create a feeling of enclosure and tranquillity.

The earliest existing plans of Packwood date from 1723, and a draft lease from that same period seems to indicate that planting was mostly restricted to the walls, with vine trees being mentioned specifically. The oldest planting still with us is the stunningly architectural fig on the south facing wall. Painstakingly pruned and trained each year, it still fruits in summer, but looks particularly impressive in winter when the intricate swirls and loops of the stems can be seen to full effect.

The pair of borders either side of the entrance gates date back to the early 20th century. Photographs from the 1940s show full herbaceous borders similar in style to today, although we've added our own contemporary tweaks. The colour palette combines a mix of silvers, blues and pinks, which we hope bring a sense of calm and softness to this simple space.

We grow all our own plants for use in the borders at Packwood, and in the summer months cuttings are taken of *Plectranthus argentatus*, a gorgeous perennial native to Australia. We grow the cuttings under cover through the winter so they can avoid the worst of our cold, damp weather. In summer, this beautiful and unusual plant is used as a silver accent to the other plants in the border, adding texture nearer the front where it can really be appreciated. Other plants to look out for include the pale pink *Primula* 'Marie Crousse' in spring, *Diascia personata* from South Africa, and *Calamagrostis brachytricha* which is a lovely architectural grass that gives airy movement to the dense planting.



The once timber framed house was rendered in the early 19th century, and is clothed with a range of climbing plants. My personal favourite is the immense *Rosa banksiae* 'Lutea,' an early flowering rambling rose with pale yellow flowers that almost seems to light up the intimate courtyard space.

As you stroll up the central path towards the house, taking in the climbers, the sundial and the borders, out of the corner of your eye you will spot a little gate set into the garden wall. Beyond this discreet entrance, is where the magic of Packwood's gardens really happens...

By Robyn Booth