

# “We could be a million miles from anywhere!”

Exotic plants and pops of lime green have turned Anthony and Gill Rumgay’s bare square of soil into a **SECRET SANCTUARY**

When Anthony and Gill Rumgay moved into their new four-bedroom redbrick house, it came with beautiful views over pasture to the Pennines at the front, and an enclosed back garden with problems. “The back garden was a hill of mud!” remembers Anthony. “Even with my experience and appetite for the grunt work of gardening, it was unworkable. The developers suggested they dig it all out for us but we would have just gone from a hill to a hole and the back fence would probably have become unstable.”

Anthony, who married Gill in 2011, has always been a keen gardener. “After my first wife died in 2004, it was working in the garden that kept me from falling apart,” he says. “Gardening is in my blood.”

Initially, he attempted to carve out terraces linked by a snaking path but the heavy clay soil proved too much. Then he came up with the idea of replicating a courtyard he remembered from way back, filled with statues, urns and planters. But Gill intervened with a shortlist of designers she’d found online, and in the second one they met, David Keegan (dkgardendesign.co.uk), they discovered exactly what they were looking for. “He looked and listened, stayed with us for about three hours and the ideas just flowed,” recalls Anthony. “Gill and I both said he has shedloads of flair born of his wide understanding of plants and his passion for creating places for them to live alongside people in a harmonious whole.”



The overlooked hill of heavy clay soil was a task too far for its owners

BEFORE

Cuprinol Garden Shades Urban Slate, £22/2.5L, [diy.com](http://diy.com)

Black Granite Coping Stone, £32.40 each, [londonstone.co.uk](http://londonstone.co.uk)

GARDEN makeover

## SMART IDEAS TO STEAL

- ✓ **PLANT PLEACHED HORNBEAMS** for instant privacy.
- ✓ **PAIR SHAPELY LEAVES** with pale paving and walls for fabulous shadows.
- ✓ **USE COPING STONES** atop raised beds to create extra seating.



Gill and Anthony's vision became reality in just 12 weeks

## OUR GARDEN PLAN

**LOCATION** Rochdale, Lancs

**THE LOOK** Tropical

**SITE** Size 80m<sup>2</sup> Faces South

**Soil** Imported, enriched with compost, dried blood and fishbone, and liquid seaweed

### OUR BUDGET

Consultation & design **£3,000**  
Excavation, landscaping & construction of walls & planters **£47,500** Slabs **£950** Galvanised steel screens & gate **£2,500** Plants & planting **£8,000** Lime green & black cube pots **£420**  
**TOTAL: £62,370**

### HOW LONG IT TOOK

Site clearance **1 week** Construction of retaining walls & perimeter beds **5 weeks** Construction of raised planters, paving & rendering **5 weeks** Planting **1 week**  
**TOTAL: 12 weeks**

## HOW WE DID IT...



**CLEARANCE WAS EASY** in this already-bare plot but 70 tons of heavy clay soil needed to be removed before work could begin.



**THE PLOT IS LEVELLED** onto three tiers, a screed base is laid and the perimeter fences are painted a charcoal grey.



**THE DECKING IS LAID** outside the back bifold doors and the team prepare for the mammoth job of paving the rest of the plot.



**A RETAINING BACK WALL** is built, the patio has been laid on three levels and the planters are in place.



**THE PLANTERS ARE RENDERED** and topped with coping stones to provide extra seating. The side fence is clad in pine.



**FINAL TOUCHES** are made to the sunken beds and raised planters, then they're filled with compost ready to be planted.



Tree fern

Giant reed

Bamboo

Turn your plot into a tropical haven too, p16

**BRIMMING** with tropical greenery, the new patio is the perfect spot for laidback dining while soaking up the view.

### INSPIRED BY A PAINTING

The choice of designer was a no-brainer and the planning began. "We showed David a painting of the Temperate House in Kew Gardens, which is home to more than 10,000 plants from the more temperate regions of the world. He got what we meant, took the idea of a courtyard, and developed it beyond anything we could have imagined," says Anthony.

David remembers the garden as little more than a bare patch of soil with an awkward slope up into one corner, which he saw as a chance to create a multilevel garden with hidden pockets

of seating among lush foliage. "In Anthony, I had a very keen gardener with good plant knowledge and with the support of Gill, it allowed for the creation of a garden that is both individual and unusual," says David.

Creating a tropical-style oasis in the north of England was a challenge, not least because of the weather, so a pleached hornbeam hedge was planted close to the boundary fence to establish a microclimate as well as provide more screening from neighbouring houses. Pathways inspired by the hothouses at Kew Gardens will eventually enjoy a lush canopy of foliage as the

plants mature, so Anthony and Gill can move unseen in their own secret garden.

"The key is to use plants that might look lush and tropical but are hardy and not necessarily tropical at all," says David. "That said, many of the plants used here require winter protection, making this type of garden more suitable for a committed gardener. It became clear during the first spring and summer that the banana trees were struggling to cope due to a wind-tunnel effect down one side of the house, so these will have to be moved into a more sheltered part of the garden."

The steep slope at the back of the garden meant adding a retaining wall at the boundary, which together with the lower wall for the raised bed, allowed the plants to be layered in height to create a dense screen of foliage.

### FINAL FLOURISHES

While Anthony is a keen gardener, Gill is not, but it was her input that influenced the final design decisions. "It was Gill's choice of stone colour, render, cladding and her vision to have the pops of lime green," says Anthony. "And it was her idea to get the side door of the garage spray-painted in matching lime green by our neighbour, who has a car body repair shop."

Just one major change was made to David's design, and that was the decision to ditch the water feature. "With all the leaves in the garden, I decided it would be a pain to keep it clear," says Anthony. "We also changed the tiles from Indian sandstone to Whitworth grey Yorkstone paving to keep close to our budget, used dark grey granite edging instead of black basalt, and the silicone render on the garage wall was dropped in favour of cladding it with yellow pine to match the long run of fencing on the opposite side of the plot."

The landscapers began work in May 2019, while Anthony and Gill went to India on a

three-week holiday to escape the mayhem.

"The landscapers colonised our drive with a gazebo, a Portaloo and all sorts of materials for the garden," remembers Anthony, "and when we got home, around 70 tons of earth and rock and rubbish had been dug out and levels created! Watching the rest of the garden take shape was a mix of, 'It seems to be taking ages' and 'Wow! Where did that come from?'"

The weather was fine, which meant the landscapers could crack on. "All the stone was cut on site but fortunately our neighbours were at work and didn't have to hear the power saw day after day," says Anthony. "The hot weather meant that the silicone render for the walls and planters had to be made in small batches to keep it workable. Our water bill quadrupled as the works were washed down each day to keep the slabs clean. And because the landscapers were using machines that took a high electrical load, our fuse box had to be upgraded and external power sockets fitted – another cost but a necessary one."

By late July, plants were being delivered on pallets from the Netherlands and from Crûg Farm in Wales (crug-farm.co.uk), and it was a daily job to keep them hydrated in the heat until

## GARDEN MAKEOVER



A painting of inside the Temperate House at Kew Gardens...



...was the inspiration behind this tropical-style courtyard

## “Our garden has enhanced our home beyond measure”

they were planted. “You can imagine the sense of urgency,” says Anthony. “The first major planting was the pleached hornbeams. Right away they screened the view of neighbouring houses and the brutal pine fences. That day the dicksonia went in too. The vision was becoming real at long last.”

### PLANT PARADISE

The first spring was an exciting time as the *Clematis armandii* came into flower and perfumed the air. “Podophyllum and rodgersia came into leaf followed by persicaria and acanthus,” recalls Anthony, “and by May the buds on the hornbeams were bursting.”

In his early 70s, Anthony appreciates that the garden is more or less one huge raised bed so it’s easy to access without too much bending down. “It’s possible to walk round the garden on the parapets, which makes every bed and planter easy to reach.”

In summer, Anthony and Gill now use the back garden as an extension of their dining room, reading, sunbathing and eating outside. “The design David produced for us has enhanced our home beyond measure and given it extra dimensions,” Anthony adds. “The interior and the exterior simply flow together. Although there is so much movement in the garden, it is such a peaceful, still space.”

### David’s tips to dazzle with pops of lime green

- 💡 Use lime green sparingly to lift the mood on dull days and shine like a beacon on bright days.
- 💡 This vibrant tone works best with muted paving and hard landscaping tones.
- 💡 *Alchemilla mollis*, *Heuchera villosa* ‘Key Lime Pie’, *Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Little Lime’, *Musa basjoo* banana trees and bird of paradise will bring zing to borders.
- 💡 Add bright green furniture such as Fermob’s Bistro Chaise Longue Sunlounger, £359, [connectionsathome.co.uk](http://connectionsathome.co.uk).
- 💡 Ronseal Garden metal and wood paint in Lime Zest, £5/250ml, [diy.com](http://diy.com), is the finishing touch.



## Tropical oasis

This generous jungle of lush green leaves enjoys a seasoning of vibrant summer colour with exotic-looking blooms. “Don’t forget green is a colour too!” says David.

### GOOD TO KNOW!

The render is kept pristine with Mould, Lichen & Algae Remover, £21.99/2L [wetandforget.co.uk](http://wetandforget.co.uk)

#### \* Soft shield fern

The soft-to-the-touch fronds of this mostly evergreen fern grow to 1.2m high and the stalks have fabulous orange-brown scales.



#### \* Passiflora caerulea

This vigorous climber is much tougher than its exotic blooms suggest. Give it a sunny sheltered position and it’ll cope with UK winters.



#### \* Dutchman’s pipe

Grow climbing *Aristolochia macrophylla* in a sunny sheltered spot for its fab heart-shaped leaves that can be 30cm long!



#### \* Alstroemeria ‘Indian Summer’

This glam new variety has fiery flowers from May to the first frosts. Keep it cosy with a duvet of mulch if you live in a chilly part of the UK.



#### \* Hakonechloa macra

Japanese forest grass is so easy to grow in sun or shade, forming tufts of lush foliage. It has sprays of green blooms in summer too.



#### \* Honey spurge

Evergreen *Euphorbia mellifera* grows to 2m tall with almost-luminous green leaves and honey-scented blooms.

