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Outdoors Homes & Property

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Buy it:
RHS geranium collection

ADAPTABLE and undemanding, these popular perennials fit into most planting styles, making handsome, leafy ground cover as well as providing cheerful flowers over a prolonged period from early summer. The RHS is offering three of each of the following three varieties for £19.99, supplied as plug plants: Geranium Summer Skies, with green-centred double flowers of pale violet to lavender, grows to 60cm; Geranium pratense Plenum Album, which has loosely double, veined white flowers and grows to 90cm; Geranium pratense Plenum Violaceum, with small, pompom-like flowers, each packed with violet petals, grows to 60cm. The nine-strong collection costs £44.97, saving £15, but Homes & Property readers can save a further 15 per cent by entering code 300612 at the checkout on rhsplants.co.uk. Offer closes midnight July 3.



Violet beauty: Geranium Plenum Violaceum produces a mass of pompom flowers from early summer

See it: Chelsea fringe events

- Opening ceremony of Edible Olympics at 11am-2pm this Saturday 2 June and Jubilee Party from 12-2pm on Tuesday 5 June, at Spitalfields City Farm, Buxton Street, E1.
- Friends of the Devonshire Road Nature Reserve, Sydenham, are creating and planting 14 sq metres of living roof on top of a green-oak building. The growing medium and plants will be installed next Monday 4 June, from 11am, which will be part of an event with fun and activities for all the family, including food and music. At 170 Devonshire Road, Forest Hill, SE23.
- Book now for a guided bike ride exploring wildflower and food-growing projects on Saturday 9 June. The day starts at 11am at Homerton Station and includes a free picnic lunch from 1pm at Mabley Green Community Meadow. Stay on after lunch and enjoy a willow-weaving workshop. Reserve your place on alix@carryme.org.uk.
- Jump on the 242 bus and join a guided tour at 11am or 3pm this Saturday 2 June around the celebrated Clapton Park "Poppy Estate", famed for its flowers and food growing. You'll receive a free pack of the Park's flower seed mix as well as tea and homemade cakes. Clapton Park Estate, Mandeville Street, E5.

For more Fringe events, visit chelseafringe.com



Guided tour: cycle through the flowers and picnic in a meadow at Homerton next Saturday



Work and play: a tree makes a leafy parasol over a meeting table (left); sports screens in the lounge can also show PowerPoint presentations



Rooftop that does the business

A good office garden can make going to work just that little bit more enjoyable

GIVEN a rooftop space above an office, the obvious solution would be to make it a garden in which workers could enjoy lunch in pleasing surroundings. Garden designer Patricia Fox, however, took the idea further – and in her garden at this year's Chelsea Flower Show displayed how an office garden could function not just as a restful, beautiful space, but as an effective workplace as well.

"The aim was to design a space where technology meets tranquillity," says Fox who, in the Rooftop Workplace of Tomorrow in association with Walworth Garden Farm, and sponsored by RBS, succeeded admirably, winning a Silver Medal for her efforts.

At first glance, the garden seems a cool, contemporary space with modernist white furniture and a sports screen, making it the ideal chill-out lounge, but a closer look reveals a raft of technology to aid, refresh and inspire the office worker.

A lounge area at the back of the garden, marked with a high-rise wall of leafy Acer campestre and covered with a weatherproof canopy, is the ideal place for meetings or even small conferences; the big LED sports screen on the back wall provides a constant run of relaxing, dreamy visuals but can also provide PowerPoint images and presentations. Due to artfully placed speak-

Pattie Barron



Everything in the garden has rounded corners, inspired by the iconic shape of the iPad and iPhone

ers, birdsong appears to filter from the overhead trees, while another tree set into a table provides a work station for several people, with a leafy parasol overhead. A separate modular building, at the front of the space, has sofas to sprawl on and an office corner that includes a printer.

The tapestry of green leaves clothing the wall alongside the building is a pick-your-own herbal tea bar: choose from calming chamomile to soothe a frazzled brain, or diverse mints, including chocolate and black pepper, to stimulate. White lavender can be picked to energise and wild strawberries are for popping into cool drinks. For those who need to escape drama and deadlines, a trio of curved hanging chairs floats invitingly, set away from the action and above aromatic plantings

of thyme and lavender as well as stachys, Convolvulus cneorum and lamium. These are, moreover, all tough, resilient plants ideally suited for rooftop conditions.

Structure in the garden is provided by chunky box cubes, thyme balls and box hedging, all in a rounded square shape. In fact, everything in the garden – the furniture, the pleached trees, even the blocks of soothing silver and green planting – has rounded corners. The inspiration for this came from Fox's observation of the iconic shape of the iPad and iPhone.

"Having no sharp edges makes the visuals easier on the eye, and gives a more tranquil environment, too."

Naturally, the garden has green credentials: all the furniture is made from upcycled materials, the decking is constructed from ecologically sound, fast-growing bamboo and the tabletops are made from compressed, recycled paper.

Meanwhile, the permanent roof that covers the modular office building is planted with wildflowers and blue-grey festuca grass to encourage wildlife as well as absorb rainwater.

Although this rooftop haven was designed with an office building in mind, the ideas in it – even the planting blocks – can be scaled down or adapted to suit the smallest town garden or patio. The room outside has never been so versatile – or so exciting.

DON'T MISS follow Pattie Barron's gardening blog at homesandproperty.co.uk/blogs

Photographs by Clive Nichols

Gardening problems?

Email our RHS expert at: gardenproblems@standard.co.uk



COMPONENTS OF THE GARDEN WORKPLACE

- To put it all together (design and project management), call Patricia Fox at Aralia Garden Design: 01279 721461 (aralia.org.uk)
- Modular building: cubeuk.co.uk
- Dex rapidly renewable bamboo decking: smithfongbamboo.co.uk
- Furniture and planters in upcycled materials: Thomas Bramwell at Aralia, as above
- LED screen and software: toshiba.co.uk/imaging
- Sound system: storm-events.co.uk

Chill-out zone: hanging chairs float above scented plants, providing a tranquil, relaxing corner