

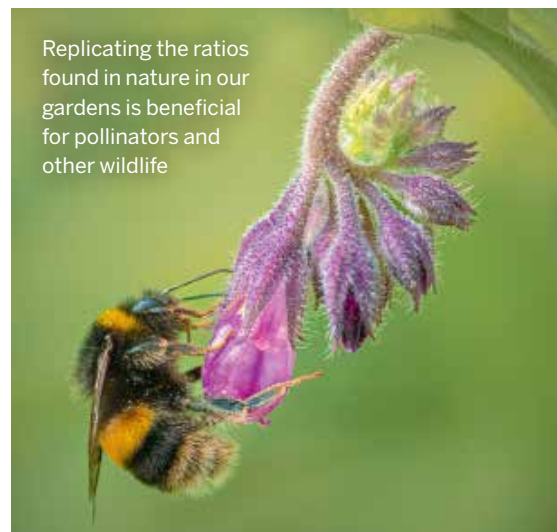
WILD PROSPECTS

This month, Urquhart & Hunt discuss harmony in nature and how they use it in their design process

Lulu Urquhart and Adam Hunt of Urquhart & Hunt won Best in Show and Gold at last year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show and were named Homes & Gardens' Garden Designer of the Year 2022. This month, the duo share their insights into the power of ratios in garden design.

THE natural world abounds with proportion, rhythm and geometry, from the perfect expanding spiral of a sunflower seed head to the calming tempo of a cooing dove. Especially ubiquitous is the Fibonacci sequence, more commonly known as the golden ratio, and also the closely related rule of thirds. Artists, architects, photographers and designers have known about the possibilities of this ratio down through the ages and it has been used in the creation of ancient cathedrals right through to the design of some very well-known contemporary classics, for example the VW Beetle.

The golden ratio expressed in nature physically creates a beautiful aesthetic. Amazingly, in practical terms, it also allows for nutrients and information to spread in a very efficient manner. We have always felt that for a garden scheme to work in all dimensions, the positioning of plants and layout of a landscape should, where possible, reflect these naturally occurring ratios and so we try to use them as a geometric underlay for all our design work.



“NATURE REMINDS US
HOW TO BE IN HARMONY
WITH LIFE ITSELF”

HAROLD W. BECKER, inspirational author and contemporary visionary

We designed our recent show garden 'A Rewilding Britain Landscape' at the 2022 Chelsea Flower Show using the golden ratio, curling the flow of streams around a decreasing spiral into a pool and ending in the beaver lodge, which was the main focus of the garden. Too close an adherence to the form looks over designed, but a general following looks just right.

We also use rule of thirds in much the same way that photographers do when taking a photo of a sunset or landscape. In simple terms, if we have a rectangular garden, we might place a significant feature – a tree, pond or sculpture – two-thirds of the way down and a third out from one side... try it... it just seems to work.

As we learn more about rewilding on our projects it seems that the landscapes with the most biodiversity also follow the rule of thirds to some degree – an innate proportion present in nature and following the Fibonacci sequence described above. Take the New Forest, one of the most biodiverse habitats in the UK. In rough terms it has one third forest cover, one third scrub and one third old growth pasture. This ratio appears to provide the maximum amount of habitat a

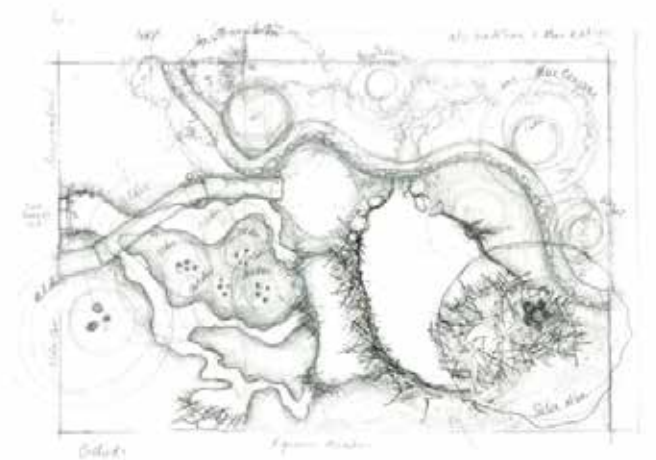


The 'A Rewilding Britain Landscape' garden – with plan shown, below – at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2022

temperate landscape can hold. It doesn't have to be pasture either, one third can be an expanse of water or bog, or even better a matrix of small ponds. So, we try keeping to this ratio of thirds in our landscape design as well, for gardens big or small.

In garden terms, a wild lawn or a flower border performs a similar function to old growth pasture, providing pollen for pollinating insects and seeds for birds. Borders are best left to stand until January or February so that as much natural organic matter as possible can fall onto the bed and create habitat for insects. Mammals can navigate the ground floor better when ground layer tufts and clumps are left to stand – they are safer from overhead predators.

Our hedges can provide the scrub layer, especially if they flower and are berry-rich, or dense and thorny, creating nesting habitat and perch points for small birds. Shrubs in borders count for the good as well. And of course, plant a tree or multiple trees if you can – espaliered and wall-trained if space is tight. What we term 'garden birds' are actually our smaller birds that in a wild habitat rely on the complexity of mid-sized plants in which to navigate, feed, breed and move. In a wilding land, you will find them using lower branch layers of small trees, fallen branches and shrubs, and



in the garden they emulate this, borrowing for example, our garden tools like spades or rakes as perch points.

The more you look, the more you will notice this incredible harmony in nature; it is present in the way a tree's branches extend, the way a blossom spirals and the way our most bountiful landscapes adhere to these simple ratios. It creates an inevitable 'rightness' within our natural knowledge systems, because this proportion is present in all of us. When we pay attention and extend our awareness, we encounter balance; hence the incredible peace we experience when we find ourselves in the presence of nature. 🌿

PHOTOGRAPHS (PORTRAIT) DAVE WATTS; (BEE) TAMMY MARLAR; (RHS CHELSEA 2022 SHOW GARDEN) JASON INGRAM; (GARDEN PLAN) LULU URQUHART