

The Casual Gardener

j.manley@irishnews.com

Going green indoors

AS THE seasons change, waving goodbye to summer doesn't have to mean the end of enjoying gorgeous plants.

You can still keep your home feeling alive with houseplants, whatever your decor style. For those new to keeping plants indoors though, knowing what to have where can seem tricky. Claire Bishop, houseplant buyer at Dobbies Garden Centres, offers the following tips on how houseplants can enhance a number of different styles and moods.

■ Au natural

Lush green plants paired with rugged terracotta containers bring the outdoors into your home.



The popular Boston fern, left, with its arching green fronds, can develop into a perfect sphere of intricate greenery. Alternatively, go for the sansevieria succulent, which adds attractive marbling to the mix. Commonly known

as snake plant or mother-in-law's tongue, sansevieria are much more soothing to have around than either of their nicknames suggests.

■ Typically tropical

For a more vibrant look, seek out dazzling tropical plants such as the Calathea peacock plant. As the name suggests, this plant is all about display, with a feathered effect in different shades of green.

Since it originates in warmer climes, Calathea will be perfectly at home in the humid atmosphere of a bathroom or kitchen – where it's likely to expand over time into a substantial, bushy addition.

■ Family fixture

For a bright, cheerful addition to any family room, turn to dependable, easy-to-grow favourites such as the spider plant. Thriving even in a brightly-lit lounge, the bold stripes of the variegated Chlorophytum will last all year round. Try a hanging basket to display it to best effect.

The peace lily is another go-to houseplant, being beautiful and almost indestructible – it actually thrives on under-watering. With its pure white flowers and deep green leaves, it's a calming presence. It's also one of the best plants for removing air pollution.

■ Shabby chic

Dispense with tradition and opt for 'guests' that will bring personality to your rooms. Coconut shells, coffee tins, brass cans – most houseplants aren't fussy – they'll thrive equally happily in unconventional containers.



Based on an ancient Japanese art, Kokedama (which directly translates as 'moss balls') are plants rooted in soil, wrapped in moss

and bound in thread. Much more than just a houseplant, these are pieces of sculptural art, perfect on a windowsill or suspended from the ceiling.



■ Beth Chatto in her garden in the late 1980s and, inset, with Christopher Lloyd

A life with plants

BETH Chatto died in May last year at the age of 94. She left behind a gardening legacy that lives on both in spirit and at Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens in Essex, a nursery-cum-horticultural centre of excellence run by her granddaughter, Julia Boulton.

The gardens have become a place of pilgrimage for thousands of fans, many of whom, in an era before the internet, gained much of their horticultural knowledge through books and magazine articles.

From her first book, 1978's *The Dry Garden*, Chatto's style was lively and enlightening. In 1998 the Garden Writers Guild recognised her contribution by giving her a lifetime achievement award. She continued to write and publish in later life with books such as *A Year in the Life of Beth Chatto's Gardens* (2012) and 2016's *Drought-Resistant Planting*.

Chatto's gardening philosophy could be summed up in the phrase 'right plant, right place', a common sense approach, yet one that delivered stunning displays, winning her 10 successive gold medals at the RHS Chelsea

Chatto's gardening philosophy could be summed up in the phrase 'right plant, right place', a common sense approach, yet one that delivered stunning displays



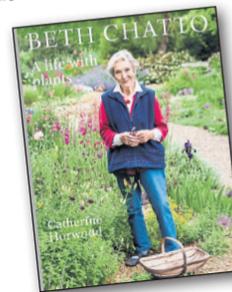
John Manley

A new book charts the life of plantswoman Beth Chatto who transformed our approach to gardening...

flower show in the 1970s. In addition to her skills as a plantswoman and designer, she was also an inspirational public speaker and lecturer.

Her methods are all the fashion these days, but once upon a time, in the not too distant patriarchal past, her ideas about providing a habitat for garden plants which mimicked that of their wild counterparts were seen as groundbreaking. Chatto's eco-friendly, organic techniques were also ahead of the curve when she first appeared on the scene, but by the end of her long career had become the mainstream.

Beth Chatto: A Life with



Plants by Catherine Horwood is not a gardening book per se, but a book about a gardener who in one way or another influenced everybody from Alan Titchmarsh and Monty Don

to Dan Pearson and Jimi Blake. Alongside her close friend Christopher Lloyd, she was responsible for a paradigm shift that saw the dominant post-war style of regimented formality eschewed in favour of layers of texture and naturalistic

abandon. As the book notes, she memorably caused a stir among the snooty RHS judges by "showing species plants that some thought were 'weeds'".

The book charts its subject's early life, her marriage to Andrew Chatto, the creation of her first proper garden on a dry, windswept site and the subsequent transformation into international influencer and charismatic, proto-celebrity

gardener. It was her garden and the challenging, arid conditions of south-eastern England that provided the palette on which her life's work was based.

Some years before her death, Chatto authorised Horwood, a social historian with a passion for plants, to write her biography, providing access to an archive dating back decades.

Featuring many previously unpublished extracts from notebooks and diaries, and drawing on broadcast material and numerous interviews with friends and collaborators, the book brings its subject back to life, enabling those previously unfamiliar with Chatto's work and influence to understand the context in which her ideas were formulated and excelled.

There's even a small section dedicated to those men who sought to woo her, both on the basis of her gardening skills and her sexuality. One extract tells of the efforts of Paul Aden, an American hosta collector who "lunged at her suggesting they become lovers" while she was a guest at his stateside home in the 1980s.

Notably, only two men that we know of succeeded in winning Chatto's affections – her husband Andrew and soulmate 'Christo' Lloyd, who with the benefit of hindsight, we can conclude was most definitely gay.

■ *Beth Chatto – A Life With Plants* by Catherine Horwood is published by Pimpernel Press.