



Fruitful endeavour

Harry Astley & Jane Scotter grow seasonal produce at Fern Verrow in Herefordshire before selling their harvest at a weekly market stall

All of the old clichés they say are true - you reap what you sow. We grow a wide range of what we call 'British garden produce'. We believe that vegetables and fruit grown outside in the fresh air, open to the elements, have more vitality and taste the best.

Fern Verrow is 16 acres in total. We cultivate five acres for fruit and vegetables, and the rest of the land is used for our sheep, Hereford cattle and poultry. We also have a woodland area where many wild edible plants and flowers grow.

All of our plants are grown from seed in seed trays in our large propagating greenhouse, where they are cared for until they are large enough to be transplanted outside. However, many are drilled directly into prepared seed beds in the fields.

We harvest once a week on Friday, and load everything up in its prime, ready to drive it to London every Saturday and sell it at our stall at Spa Terminus. The visuals and beauty of it are very important, and the satisfaction with the end result is thrilling.

The days are different throughout the seasons, but there's definitely a rhythm to the year. Shorter work days in the winter,

which gives you time to sleep and rest, in contrast to midsummer when we could be working 16-hour days. We have to take the opportunity to get ahead in the sunshine.

We have different roles on the farm, but work together with the amount we're going to grow and where we're going to put it. We enjoy working with the different soils, nurturing plants and harvesting - it's the fruits of our labour.

There are days when it can be overwhelming, especially digging up leeks on a cold and wet day, but if you're dressed warmly and there's a cup of tea waiting at the end of it, then it's all forgotten!

Our first book *'Fern Verrow - A Year Of Recipes From A Farm And Its Kitchen'* came out in May, which is exciting. There are chapters about growing, our story and our lives.

Another chapter for us is a new growing project with Skye Gyngell at Spring Restaurant in London. Our job is to inspire the chefs with our produce, turning it into really creative things, such as cordials, cocktails and ice creams. It's a growing collaboration between the restaurant and us. ♦



Chip chop

Neill Gretton used to wash dishes for a living, but branched out to set up his own tree surgery business

My brother Tom has always been a climber - he used to climb the roof of our family home when we were young. I was less adventurous.

I used to wash dishes at a patisserie in Bath. I got my start when Tom set up his own tree surgery company, and I started working as his grindsmen. It was a great opportunity, as I hadn't thought about what I wanted to do. I came on leaps and bounds, and had a flair for climbing. I learned everything from scratch, and gained my qualifications as I worked.

We were a good team, but seven years was long enough for brothers to work together. I joined the local council's tree team in 2006, and became team leader within two years, which allowed me to work on some really fine trees.

After gaining invaluable experience, I decided to run my own business five years ago. Now I have a team of four.

We use a four-wheel drive, which helps us get across fields and has a tipping back for loading the wood chipper and chainsaw as well as the harnesses, ropes and weights.

The best time to do tree work is when it's winter and it's dry. This is a job where you wear lots of heavy-duty clothing, so in the summer you can really feel the heat.

For someone trying to get into the industry, the best thing to do is get experience - that's the tough bit. You never stop learning - this year, I've been working on walnut trees, which is new to me.

The best parts of the job are being in a different location every day, and seeing views that no-one else gets to see. When you're up the full height of a tree, it's just amazing. I'm pretty good with heights, and don't tend to get nervous - it's all part of being a tree surgeon! ♦



Band of brothers

Harry & David Rich grew up and designed gardens in Wales before breaking onto the show circuit with gardens at RHS Chelsea Flower Show

We grew up in the countryside and have always loved being outside. We studied to be landscape architects, three years apart, and had hoped to work for a big landscape company in New York or San Francisco. But reality hit, and we realised there were no jobs available, so we spent time sorting out cobbles and touching up soils.

We applied to do an RHS Chelsea Flower Show garden in 2011, but they turned us down and advised us to do a smaller show first. So we did RHS Cardiff Flower Show in 2012, and did really well. We applied to do Chelsea again in 2013, and they advised us to do an Artisan Garden first. Then, last year, the RHS accepted our application to create a Main Avenue show garden, and helped find us our sponsors.

Our show garden at RHS Chelsea this year, the Cloudy Bay garden, is quite contemporary compared to last year's. The main focal point is a 'shack' that actually moves through the space.

Every day is different, but we are usually in the office on a sunny day, and outside on a rainy day! We also have a two-year old Labrador, Darcy, who comes to work with us. Our day revolves around her, to be honest!

It is an amazing experience to design at RHS Chelsea - we're feeling positive and excited. We always find we are working even when we should be having time off, but it's our lifestyle and choice. It's nice to try and keep it Monday to Friday, but with the lead-up to the show it runs into the weekends too. We do whatever is needed to keep things ticking along.

We have become quite dependent on each other, as we live and work together. We are hoping to move to London soon to set up a little studio.

Looking back on what we've done, it's gone really well, really fast. It's surreal, but we love it. ♦