



# FROM SEED TO PLATE

Champion of locally grown organic produce, Raymond Blanc has made heirloom vegetables the heroes of a newly designed one-and-a-half-acre plot in his gardens at Le Manoir in Oxfordshire

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**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP** Clipped bay domes and box balls add structure to the herb garden, which is planted with rosemary (left) and angelica (right); grow lamps in the glasshouse provide extra daylight for vegetables in winter.

**THIS PAGE, FROM TOP** A section of the herb garden with English mace and camomile; Raymond Blanc at the entrance to his heritage garden, which is surrounded by growing screens and entered through a rustic gate, made by master craftsman Ed Brooks.

“Seasonality and diversity in gardening are vital,” says Raymond Blanc emphatically, as he takes time out of his relentless schedule to show us round his latest venture: a heritage garden for today. It has been created in the well-established grounds that surround and sustain his two Michelin-starred restaurant and hotel in Oxfordshire, Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons.

“Growing your own food, or knowing that it has been grown close to home, in the right season provides you with produce that has a better flavour, colour and texture,” says Raymond. “It also helps to support the local economy in so many ways and, of course, there is a real joy in gardening and then cooking your own produce.”

For all those who grow their own, however, there are many more without the resources to do so. This, Raymond insists, is why we as consumers have a responsibility to demand a wide seasonal range, to ask where our food comes from and to expect the answer to be “from near where you live”. To do that Britain not only has to preserve its gardening knowledge and heritage plants, but also needs lots more gardens and trained gardeners.

This is at the heart of why this new garden, designed by Anne Keenan MSGD (Member of the Society of Garden Designers), came into being, as Raymond explains.

**Why a heritage garden?** “I’ve worked with Garden Organic and with Bob Sherman, its recently retired chief horticultural officer, for many years and its Heritage Seed Library is amazing. We use many of its vegetable



varieties at Le Manoir and it seemed fitting to create something that would showcase them here. When my dear friend Johnny Mobasher from Hartley Botanic suggested a glasshouse, I thought we could use this beautiful structure and create a garden around it.”

**How did you choose a design for the garden?** “We ran a competition with the Society of Garden Designers to find a designer and also a young gardener to take up a placement here, to get involved in the creation of the garden and to learn the skills needed to maintain it.

“Deciding on the winners wasn’t easy, but Anne Keenan’s design fully incorporated the glasshouse as the main focus. It was also aesthetically pleasing, yet practical for our level of production and the display of heritage vegetables.

“We selected David Love Cameron as our first garden scholar for his pure views about growing organic and heritage food and his determination to take what he learns here back to Belfast, to share with the communities that he works with there.”

**Which crops are you growing?** “As a chef, I’m interested in growing anything I’ve not tried before but, to begin with, we’re concentrating on the endangered varieties that were once the mainstay of British gardens, things such as broad beans and lettuce.”

**And in the future? Is this garden a model you want others to follow?** “The glasshouse is principally for growing vegetables, but we also have plans to start a gardening school, with the glasshouse as a base. I’m lucky that we have space at Le Manoir to grow so many varieties but, even if people’s space is limited, I urge them to make the most of what they have to grow some wonderful fruit and vegetables.”



**THIS PICTURE** Growing screens frame views of the glasshouse and divide up a bed planted with the sweetcorns ‘Golden Bantam’ and ‘Rainbow Inca’.  
**BELOW** Willow expert Jay Davey wove the beautiful screens with circular detail.



## GROWING UNDER GLASS

To keep the restaurant kitchen supplied with the tender and exotic vegetables it needs all year round, head gardener Anne-Marie Owens and her team use the Victorian glasshouse, designed to order by Hartley Botanic.

“It has manual blinds, a series of vents and a dual air conditioning and heating system,” says managing director Johnny Mobasher.

“The heat and grow lamps allow us to grow lemongrass and micro-leaves for salads during the winter, while the space means a better air flow around the plants, which in turn helps prevent fungal diseases,” says Anne-Marie.



## ANNE KEENAN DESIGNING A HERITAGE GARDEN FOR TODAY

**MY INSPIRATION** “The local Cotswold stone and the circular patterns at Le Manoir, in the dovecot, the box balls and even in the local church gate nearby, led me to create a structure based on circles, which take the eye away from the awkward L shape of the site.”

**THE DETAIL** “A round area edged with dry stone walls provides seating in front of the glasshouse, and circular motifs are woven into the growing screens that divide up the space and frame different views. I also designed a bench using wine cases and old Champagne bottles, while logs from trees felled after last year’s storms provide insect habitats and flowering plants attract bees to pollinate the crops.”



**THIS PICTURE** The Champagne bottle bench creates a captivating resting place amid plantings of white borage (left) and ‘Rose

de Roscoff’ onions (in foreground). **RIGHT** Logs from an old birch hedge make textured walls that provide a nesting site for beneficial insects.



## TOP TIPS FOR ORGANIC GARDENING

David Love Cameron, who won the competition to be Le Manoir's first garden scholar and work in the heritage garden, gives advice

■ "Make sure the soil is well fed using all-natural feeds. We use compost mulches made from Le Manoir's own garden and kitchen waste. As everything in the waste is organic, using it to feed the soil completes the circle. We also use green manures, such as the quick-growing hardy annual phacelia, and field beans. In winter, we sow these so they cover the soil to prevent erosion and help keep weeds at bay and, in spring, we dig the plants into the soil to increase its fertility."

■ "Choose robust old varieties such as the shelling pea 'Carruthers' Purple

Podded' and the French bean 'Bird's Egg', and keep the plants healthy by mulching annually with organic compost and feeding with seaweed solution – a natural product that boosts growth."

■ "To create your own organic vegetable garden, research the crops that have been traditionally grown in your area, as these will probably suit your conditions best and you'll be helping to keep your own local heritage alive. Also speak to older gardeners in your area and ask what they used to grow, and look through the old garden journals held at your local library." □



**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT** The view from the glasshouse; just outside the structure, the circular seating area is built from local Cotswold stone; gardeners Anna Greenland (left), David Love Cameron and Anne-Marie Owens take

a break on the bottle bench; a small pool, made from an oak whisky barrel, attracts wildlife; the garden is packed with crops, including the heritage broad bean 'Martock' (in foreground) and French bean 'Bird's Egg', climbing the cane wigwams.



### USEFUL CONTACTS

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