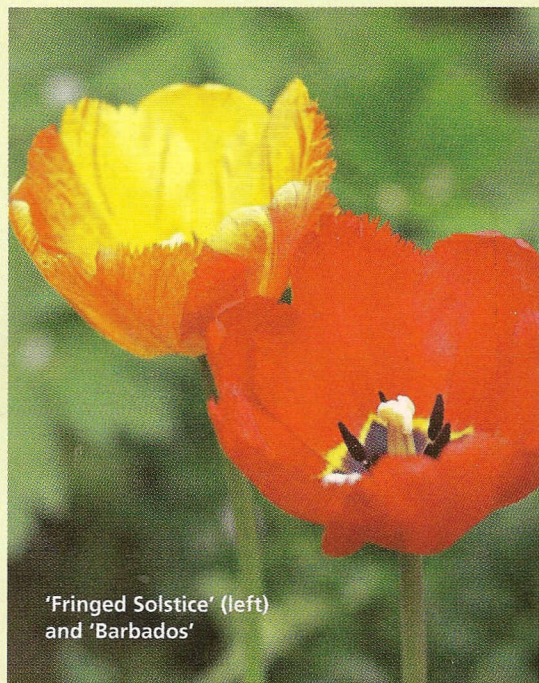


*This photo: A frothy sweep of tulips—double white 'Mondial', triumph 'Agrass White', and 'Yellow Spring Green'—are underplanted with white scilla, puschkinia, and Anemone blanda.*

By Karen Weir-Jimerson  
Photography by Kritsada



'Fringed Solstice' (left)  
and 'Barbados'

Jan van Opstal (left)  
and Jo Willems, with  
their Swiss Mountain  
dog, Heeron, admire  
the view of their  
Dutch garden.



# Tulip Time

With theatrical flourish, a rush of colorful flowers fills the narrow rooms of adjoining Dutch gardens featuring separate styles.

The rush of spring color is the gardening season's first act, and in Jo Willems and Jan van Opstal's garden in Maastricht, Netherlands, spring sweeps onstage with colorful fanfare. Arching tulips, trumpeted daffodils, pendulous hellebores, dancing bleeding hearts, and ferns unfurl with gusto to brighten the landscape.

The garden's name, De Heerenhof (Dutch for "the two gentlemen"), eloquently explains the project's genesis. Jo and Jan created an extensive multiroom garden, the Old Gentleman, that spans the entire length and width of their backyard. When that garden was complete, they purchased part of their adjoining neighbor's yard and made another, the New Gentleman. The twin gardens represent different garden styles—sort of individual plays within a play.





**Opposite:** A tulip-studded path alongside the pond meanders into the plane-tree circle. **Left:** Pots of *Tulipa* 'Purple Prince' are underplanted with blue pansies. **Above:** The theater area features tulips (whose foliage later disappears to allow summer seating), including 'West Point', 'Spring Green', 'Fringed Elegance', 'Hollands Glorie', 'Washington', 'Oranjezon', 'Ile de France', and 'Flaming Parrot'.

As the backyard of a farmhouse, the older garden started out life as a meadow. Over the years, it became overgrown and underused. Enter Jo and Jan with no gardening experience. "When we came here to live 19 years ago, there were still traces of a small vegetable garden surrounded by overgrown hedges and shrubs," Jo says. Masses of weeds and an odd assortment of rubbish littered the lot. "Tires, bicycles, crockery—you name it," he says.

With a sketch from a landscape architect friend, the Old Gentleman started to take shape. "The best way to describe the design is a yin-yang symbol," Jo says. "The dividing line between the halves of the circle is the garden path. It starts right behind the house on an elevated terrace, meanders around the trunk of a plane tree, and winds up at the pond."

Part of the charm of the Old Gentleman is its shape: the long, narrow layout allows for a series of successive scenes and surprises. The garden starts in a terrace area right outside the house. The low green borders feature spring-blooming perennials, such as hellebores, ferns, lungworts, and boxwoods. The area's focal point is a blooming *Paulownia* tree and cascading wisteria.

A stone path bids you forward into each new space in the garden. A circle of plane trees with their branches trained horizontally onto an arbor creates a

shaded space in summer; in spring, the trees are all trunks and branches, revealing a magical shape, the bones of the structure. The narrow walkway leads onward to the edge of a large irregularly shaped pond that adds a natural element to the backyard plan—as well as a home for native wildlife, such as frogs, fish, and birds. Every season brings a change. In spring, exuberant swaths of *Narcissus* line the edge of the water with little clumps of 'Pipit', 'Waterperry', and 'Sugarbush'. A ruffle of *Muscari* 'Golden Fragrance' lines the path edges. "In summer, I like the morning by the water—with the birds," Jan says.

The Bower Arbor Garden and Mirror Garden feature formal designs, complete with boxwood hedges. As is common in Dutch gardens, boxwoods are pruned with precision—not a leaf out of place. The ornate and intimate rooms open to the Farmer Garden and Chicken Meadow. In these green casual spaces, you may be greeted (or just as likely ignored) by the busy hens who come and go from their chicken house, strutting about the garden and lawn in search of insects—and revealing a hint of the Old Gentleman's agrarian past.

As you make your way through the hen-dotted lawn, you pass through a pair of tall black iron gates to the finale of the garden—an open-air theater with brick-and-lawn stair-step seating. On long



**Above:** A hen surveys the garden for insects atop a brick roost at the back of the garden.

summer evenings, poetry readings, and small theatrical productions add glitter to the landscape. "The garden still surprises me by his change of atmosphere," Jan says. "Sometimes [he is] bold and colorful and then mysterious and silent."

When Jo and Jan had completely filled every square inch of their backyard, they realized they weren't done. So they bought part of the adjoining property in 2001 and created the New Gentleman garden. Modern, traditional, and smaller than the Old Gentleman, this garden features two rooms: the Green Garden and the Pool Garden. The Green Garden is a fantasy of bubbly boxwood hedges growing beneath a modern steel overhead structure. The peaceful Pool Garden features a raised reflecting pond with a center crowded in white *Leucojum*. Around it meanders a bed of white and yellow tulips underplanted with froths of *Anemone blanda*.

The rooms of De Heerenhof represent many styles of gardens—from wild to whimsical and rustic to formal. Yet overall, what the garden most reflects are the passions of the two gentlemen, Jo and Jan, who created it. ■

For more information, see the Buyer's Guide on page 102.



1. New Gentleman Garden: Green Garden
2. New Gentleman Garden: Pool Garden
3. Old Gentleman Garden: Green Theatre
4. Old Gentleman Garden: Chicken Meadow
5. Old Gentleman Garden: Farmer Garden
6. Old Gentleman Garden: Mirror Garden
7. Old Gentleman Garden: Bower Arbor Garden
8. Old Gentleman Garden: Bridge
9. Old Gentleman Garden: Plane Tree Rondell
10. Terrace

## garden at a glance

**ZONE:** Although it's in the Netherlands, this garden is comparable to USDA Zone 8.

**SIZE:** Old Gentleman: 39x328 feet; New Gentleman: 65x200 feet

**AGE:** The old garden is about 20 years old; the new garden is about nine years old.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:** Originally the garden area was overgrown and litter-ridden, so major excavation was done to make the ground plantable. Also there are sunlight inconsistencies in the garden—most obvious in the Mirror Garden (where plant symmetry is important); one spot gets more sun than others, which makes plants grow differently.

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