

■ Complete Cottage Garden Planting Guide

Detailed Growing Instructions, Companion Planting & Seasonal Care

Whether you're starting from scratch or expanding an existing border, this guide gives you everything you need: **growing instructions** for the most-loved cottage garden plants, **companion planting charts** to maximise colour and health, and a full **seasonal care schedule** to keep your garden flourishing from January to December.

1. Detailed Growing Instructions

Lavender (<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>)			
<i>Hardy perennial shrub</i>			
Soil	Well-drained, alkaline to neutral	Sun	Full sun
Water	Low – drought tolerant once established	Plant	Spring or early autumn
Depth	Crown at soil level	Spacing	40–45 cm apart
Height	45–60 cm		
• <i>Cut back by one-third after flowering – never into old wood.</i> • <i>Excellent on slopes or raised beds; hates waterlogged roots.</i> • <i>Harvest flower spikes just before fully open for drying.</i>			

Echinacea / Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)			
<i>Hardy herbaceous perennial</i>			
Soil	Fertile, well-drained	Sun	Full sun to partial shade
Water	Moderate – water during dry spells in first year	Plant	Spring
Depth	Crown at soil level	Spacing	45–60 cm apart
Height	60–90 cm		
• <i>Dead-head to extend flowering; leave late seed heads for goldfinches.</i> • <i>Divide every 3–4 years in spring to maintain vigour.</i> • <i>Chelsea Chop (cut back by one-third in late May) gives later, sturdier stems.</i>			

Salvia (Salvia nemorosa / S. x sylvestris)

Hardy perennial

Soil	Light, well-drained	Sun	Full sun
Water	Low to moderate	Plant	Spring
Depth	Crown at soil level	Spacing	40 cm apart
Height	40–60 cm		

- *Cut back hard after first flush for a strong second flowering.*
- *Superb with roses and grasses; very tolerant of poor soil.*
- *Protect crowns with grit or leaf mould in very cold winters.*

Foxglove (Digitalis purpurea)

Hardy biennial (self-seeds freely)

Soil	Moist, well-drained, acidic to neutral	Sun	Partial shade to full sun
Water	Moderate – keep moist in dry summers	Plant	Sow seed Jun–Jul for following year's blooms
Depth	Surface sow; needs light to germinate	Spacing	45 cm apart
Height	90–150 cm		

- *Allow some to self-seed for a self-sustaining colony.*
- *All parts are toxic – wear gloves when handling.*
- *Ideal at the back of a border or under deciduous trees.*

Delphinium (Delphinium elatum hybrids)

Hardy perennial

Soil	Rich, fertile, well-drained	Sun	Full sun, sheltered from wind
Water	Regular – do not let dry out in growing season	Plant	Spring or autumn
Depth	Crown just below soil level	Spacing	60 cm apart
Height	120–180 cm		

- *Stake early with canes; stems snap easily in wind.*
- *Cut back to ground after flowering for a second, shorter flush.*
- *Feed with high-potash fertiliser monthly through summer.*

Geranium / Hardy Cranesbill (Geranium spp.)

Hardy herbaceous perennial

Soil	Any reasonable garden soil	Sun	Sun or shade – very adaptable
Water	Low to moderate	Plant	Spring or autumn
Depth	Crown at soil level	Spacing	30–45 cm apart
Height	20–60 cm (varies by species)		

- *Shear back hard after first flowering for fresh foliage and second flush.*
- *Excellent ground cover under roses and shrubs.*
- *G. pratense self-seeds – manage by dead-heading if preferred.*

Aquilegia / Columbine (Aquilegia vulgaris)

Hardy perennial (short-lived; self-seeds)

Soil	Moist, well-drained, fertile	Sun	Full sun to partial shade
Water	Moderate	Plant	Sow fresh seed Jul–Aug or plant spring
Depth	Surface sow or crown at soil level	Spacing	30 cm apart
Height	45–90 cm		

- *Let a few seed heads ripen and scatter for natural self-seeding.*
- *Hybrids will revert to purples and blues over generations – embrace it!*
- *Prone to leaf miners – cosmetic only; rarely needs treatment.*

Allium (Allium hollandicum / A. cristophii)

Hardy bulb

Soil	Well-drained	Sun	Full sun
Water	Low – bulbs rot in wet conditions	Plant	Autumn (Oct–Nov)
Depth	3x bulb diameter (approx. 10–15 cm)	Spacing	15–20 cm apart
Height	60–120 cm		

- *Plant bulbs among perennials so foliage is hidden as it dies back.*
- *Leave seed heads standing – architectural and wildlife-friendly.*
- *Naturalises well; clumps increase over years.*

Penstemon (Penstemon spp.)

Hardy to half-hardy perennial

Soil	Well-drained, moderately fertile	Sun	Full sun to light shade
Water	Moderate – tolerates some drought	Plant	Spring (after last frost)
Depth	Crown at soil level	Spacing	40 cm apart
Height	40–90 cm		

- *Do NOT cut back until spring – old stems protect the crown in winter.*
- *Take semi-ripe cuttings in August as insurance against hard winters.*
- *Dead-head regularly for near-continuous summer blooming.*

Rose (Rosa – shrub and climbing varieties)

Hardy deciduous shrub

Soil	Deep, fertile, moisture-retentive but well-drained	Sun	Full sun (min. 6 hours)
Water	Regular – deep soak weekly in dry weather	Plant	Bare root Nov–Mar; container any time
Depth	Bud union at or just below soil level	Spacing	60–90 cm (shrub); 2–3 m (climbers)
Height	60 cm – 5+ m		

- *Prune shrub roses by one-third in autumn; hard prune in early spring.*
- *Mulch generously in spring with well-rotted manure.*
- *Choose disease-resistant varieties (e.g. David Austin) to minimise spraying.*

2. Companion Planting Chart

Companion planting exploits natural relationships between plants to deter pests, attract pollinators, improve soil, and create beautiful combinations. Use this chart to plan your borders for maximum health and colour.

Plant	Best Companions	Avoid	Why It Works
Lavender	Roses, Echinacea, Allium, Thyme	Mint, Shade-lovers	Repels aphids; attracts bees
Echinacea	Rudbeckia, Salvia, Monarda, Grasses	Aggressive spreaders	Pollinator powerhouse
Salvia	Roses, Allium, Catmint, Lavender	Brassicas	Deters rose pests
Foxglove	Roses, Geranium, Astrantia, Ferns	Fennel	Produces growth hormones benefiting neighbours
Delphinium	Achillea, Penstemon, Salvia	Competitive grasses	Height contrast; shared pollinator appeal
Geranium	Roses, Foxglove, Aquilegia, Allium	Aggressive spreaders	Ground cover suppresses weeds
Aquilegia	Geranium, Astrantia, Geum, Pulmonaria	Invasive mints	Early spring nectar for long-tongued bees
Allium	Roses, Carrots, Lavender, Salvia	Legumes (beans/peas)	Sulphur compounds deter soil pests
Penstemon	Lavender, Echinacea, Catmint	Tall brassicas	Hummingbird-bee magnet; long season
Rose	Allium, Catmint, Salvia, Geranium	Fennel, Brassicas	Classic partnership – natural pest control

Key Principles of Cottage Garden Companion Planting
• Layer heights: tall (delphiniums, foxgloves) → mid (roses, echinacea) → low (geraniums, catmint).
• Interplant spring bulbs (alliums, tulips) among perennials – the dying bulb foliage is hidden by emerging perennial growth.
• Include at least one umbellifer (achillea, astrantia) per border section to attract beneficial predatory insects.
• Avoid monocultures – diverse planting naturally limits pest and disease spread.
• Repeat key plants (e.g. salvia, catmint) in drifts of 3–5 to create visual rhythm and stronger ecological impact.

3. Seasonal Care Schedule

■ Spring (March – May)

The busiest season: planting, dividing, feeding, and staking before the main summer flush.

March	Cut back penstemons to live buds. Divide large clumps of asters, monarda, and phlox. Stake delphiniums as growth emerges. Weed borders thoroughly.
April	Plant out hardy perennials and bare-root roses. Feed roses with specialist fertiliser. Allow allium foliage to die back naturally. Begin slug patrol.
May	Chelsea Chop echinacea and rudbeckia (cut by one-third) for later, sturdier blooms. Mulch borders 5–8 cm deep. Tie in climbers. Watch for aphids.

■ Summer (June – August)

Peak flowering season. Focus on dead-heading, watering, taking cuttings, and enjoying the display.

June	Dead-head lavender, salvia, and catmint regularly. Cut geraniums hard after first flush for a second. Water new plantings deeply. Support phlox against rain.
July	Dead-head roses, echinacea, and rudbeckia continuously. Collect aquilegia and foxglove seed. Clip catmint by half for late flush. Feed containers weekly.
August	Take semi-ripe cuttings of lavender, salvia, penstemon. Leave seed heads of eryngium and allium for wildlife. Apply potassium-rich feed for next year's blooms.

■ Autumn (September – November)

Planting season for bulbs and bare-root stock. Dividing, tidying, and preparing for winter.

September	Plant spring bulbs – alliums, narcissus, tulips. Divide hostas and astrantia while soil is warm. Cut back crocosmia. Reduce watering frequency gradually.
October	Plant bare-root roses and shrubs. Begin cutting back summer perennials; leave some for structure. Lift tender agapanthus in colder regions. Top-dress borders.
November	Mulch hellebore crowns with leaf mould. Plant garlic between perennials as pest deterrent. Clean and oil tools. Leave grasses and seed heads for overwintering wildlife.

❄️ Winter (December – February)

Rest and planning season. Protect vulnerable plants, order seeds, and review the year's successes.

December	Plan next year's planting and order seeds early. Cut back remaining spent growth if not done. Protect pot-grown agapanthus with fleece or move under cover.
January	Order bare-root plants from specialist nurseries. Check hellebores – remove tatty foliage to expose flowers. Apply grit to drainage-sensitive crowns in wet spells.
February	Start hellebore seeds under glass. Divide snowdrops 'in the green' after flowering. Apply balanced granular fertiliser lightly. Prepare planting areas.

Quick Reference: Soil & Site Checklist

Soil pH	6.0–7.0 for most cottage perennials (test with a kit; adjust with lime or sulphur)
Drainage	Improve heavy clay by digging in grit and organic matter before planting
Fertility	Incorporate well-rotted manure or compost before planting; top-dress annually
Sunlight	Aim for 6+ hours per day for sun-lovers; shade varieties tolerate as little as 3 hours
Watering	Establish all new plants with regular watering in year one; most are drought-tolerant after
Weed control	Mulch 5–8 cm deep each spring; hand-weed rather than hoe near shallow-rooted perennials
Pest watch	Regular inspection beats treatment – catch infestations early; encourage natural predators

All advice is tailored for a temperate maritime climate (UK/Northern Europe). Adjust timings by 2–4 weeks for your local conditions. Your garden's aspect, soil, and microclimate will always be the best guide.