



## Will Smithson

An epiphany in New Zealand led to a career change for former recruitment consultant Will Smithson. He's now head gardener at South Wood Farm, designed by Arne Maynard

PORTRAIT JASON INGRAM

**Earliest gardening memory** I remember spending hours with my grandma on her farm, walking through the hay meadows and asking her to name all the different types of flowers and grasses.

**Have you always worked as a gardener?** I used to be an account manager for an IT recruitment company. I left after three years and moved to New Zealand with my now wife and, stunned by the beauty of the country, realised that whatever job I did next absolutely had to be outdoors. On my return I studied for my RHS qualifications at evening classes, and started work at Yeo Valley Organic Garden.

**Horticultural heroes** Charles Dowding for saving me from double digging! No dig is such a great ethos and one that should definitely be taken on board by more commercial growers.

**Favourite garden** Mapperton House in Dorset was the first garden I visited and I loved the whole atmosphere of the place. Especially the contrast between the informal banks of ox-eye daisies and the formality of all the clipped yew topiary that they have there.

**Most valuable training** I spent a day learning propagation with Marina Christopher, from Phoenix Perennial Plants and my success rate in all

areas from seed germination to cuttings taking root improved greatly.

**Favourite planting style** Arts and Crafts-style gardens with their mix of topiary and herbaceous borders, as well as the use of natural materials wherever possible.

**If you had to leave your garden in a hurry, what one plant would you take with you?** I'd currently struggle without *Phlox paniculata* 'Cool of the Evening' in the borders. However, if I was in a real hurry I'd grab a pot of *Pelargonium sidoides*.

**Points of inspiration** I now find I'm using Instagram more as a source of inspiration. I follow lots of other gardeners and designers as well as interior designers and crafts people from around the world. Debby Tenquist and Claus Dalby are my two favourites giving an insight into a range of different garden styles.

**Next big project you'll be tackling in the garden** We're about to start work on a knot garden, using a combination of yew and osmanthus.

**Contact** [williamjamesmithson@gmail.com](mailto:williamjamesmithson@gmail.com) or @solegardener on Instagram. South Wood Farm is in Devon and opens for the National Gardens Scheme, [ngs.co.uk](http://ngs.co.uk). Visitors also welcome by appointment.