

Canadian GARDENING

Design & Decor - Design Ideas



The natural planting style

By Lorraine Flanigan

| Photography by Janet Davis

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Lorraine Flanigan talks to world-famous Dutch landscape designer Piet Oudolf, renowned for developing the Natural Planting Style. Inspired by nature and skilfully shaped by innovative plant combinations, this elegant look is easy to get with our tips and plant picks

Piet Oudolf is renowned for developing the Natural Planting Style—also known as the New Wave Movement. This style is inspired by nature and skilfully shaped by innovative plant combinations, yet Oudolf's approach is still grounded in traditional Dutch garden design principles, particularly those of Mien Ruys, who some 50 years ago described her philosophy as “a wild planting in a strong design.” Oudolf has applied his technique to many residential and public gardens in his native Netherlands and in Great Britain, the U.S. and, most recently, in Canada at the Toronto Botanical Garden.

LF: What is the Natural Planting Style and how is it unique?

PO: Traditional design is dogmatic—it's all rules. This style allows for greater freedom. It's not random; it's thought out and there are still some rules, but there's more room for experimentation. ([Get the look for yourself here.](#))

LF: How did you develop this planting method?

PO: At first, I didn't understand how plants worked together in a design, so in my mind I spent 24 hours a day in the garden until the message came through, and I figured out how [certain combinations fit together](#). I believe it's important to find a balance using a variety of forms and textures. I'm not fond of specimens that stand out from the group.

LF: What is your inspiration?

PO: I'm a picture man. I see pictures in nature and translate them to the garden. The Natural Planting Style doesn't mean you just copy nature, but rather, you are inspired by it, reducing its outward form and finding an emotional response. For example, a field of wild *Echinops* [globe thistle] that I saw growing in Slovenia might inspire me, but I'll use *Eryngium* [sea holly] instead to achieve the same feeling. It's not just about specific flowers, but rather the overall effect you hope to achieve.

LF: Can you give an example of how you paint a picture in your mind to create a feeling?

PO: At the Lurie Garden in Chicago, my vision was of walking through a rolling landscape. So I worked with Roy Diblik of North Wind Perennial Farm [a native plants specialist located in Wisconsin] to select plants that grow only waist high to give the visitor the feeling of moving through a meadow.



Photos from top: *The Toronto Botanical Garden in July* by Janet Davis – beautifulbotany.com and designer Piet Oudolf by Roger Yip.

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