



"We move too fast to follow fashion"

Garden fashion is haphazard at best. Alex Mitchell takes a tongue-in-chic look at our sartorial whims



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Nancy Lancaster, 20th-century design influencer of gardens and interiors, was fond of repeating the wisdom of her Virginian grandfather. 'Fashion,' he said, 'is for people with no taste.' This must make gardeners a group of people with unimpeachable good taste, because we most definitely know nothing about fashion.

Everyone understands the best clothes to wear when gardening are whatever you happen to have on when you're staring out the window and suddenly, urgently, spot that a delphinium needs staking or that your lady's mantle is in the wrong place. Either that or it's what happens to be by the back door. This is why most people garden in Crocs and pyjamas tucked into ski socks.

Of course there are a few exceptions and gardening has gifted us with some very strong looks. Vita Sackville-West famously championed boots and breeches, which remain my style goals to this day (though I've always thought they look a little flappy round the hips to be navigating through a rose bush). The aforementioned Lancaster deadheaded in a wide-brimmed Mexican hat. Not to be

outdone, Rhoda Lady Birley tended her borders at Charleston Manor in both a conical hat and a headscarf just to cover all the bases.

These days Monty Don carries off the workwear-chic look with great panache, with Edwardian-style trousers held up by braces and a blue linen jacket, all the better to lean pensively on a spade handle. I've never quite got over the disappointment that the female equivalent of this style – buttoned up blouses and long skirts – is more Mrs Danvers than the free-wheeling woman of the earth I'm aiming for. And I remain steadfast on the fact that only the late, great Beth

Chatto could entirely pull off a quilted jerkin.

Real gardeners don't have gardening clothes because they're always just popping out into the garden to do this or that. They're always gardening. It would be like Gregg

Wallace having special eating clothes. Instead, they have jumpers covered in snagged threads from thorns and jeans that started off as 'definitely not for the garden' jeans, but have since developed pouches in the knee area stained a troubling khaki.

Gardening jumper

I reserve particular suspicion for anyone who claims to have a 'gardening jumper'. Look closely at this item – usually brown or autumn-coloured – I can guarantee it will be devoid of holes and old seed heads because they never ever wear it. It stays folded up in the cupboard and exists only in their dreams of virtual leaf raking, bonfires and mugs of tea steaming into the autumn dusk.

Maybe I should change my ways. Perhaps I should save my denim and see what clothes are designed especially for women gard... oh my eyes. Flowery, pink dungarees with multiple pockets, all the better for storing your tiny lady snippers/sick bags in? I'll take my chances thanks.

So keep wearing your pyjamas, your running shorts, your old tracksuit bottoms held up with string. Keep ruining your jeans and getting rose prickles in the soles of your slippers. Save your fashion sense for the plants and garden like nobody's watching.

As if you need to be told... 🌸



Carry on gardening like nobody's watching

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK