

# 'I'm at my happiest in waders!'

**MY LIFE**  
in plants

## The first plant I ever grew

As a child I loved watching tiny cress seeds germinate and stand, proudly upright, on damp kitchen paper on the windowsill. My first home was a shared mews house, surrounded by taller buildings with no visible greenery with the exception of my minuscule balcony. The confined space, combined with the lack of view, suffocated me, so every available space, shelf and worktop would be covered with pots containing any plant I could lay my hands on from the local garden centre.

## The plant that shaped the gardener I am today

This would be, without doubt, the delicate native English bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. As my gardening style is very much a natural one, I adore being among these tiny, violet-blue jewels that carpet ancient woodlands and verges, and always intoxicate with their delicate scent. I always try to include them when underplanting a canopy of trees.

## My favourite plant in the world

Trees, as they're incredibly important being the lungs of the earth, and as a species, we couldn't exist without them. I love their architectural qualities, the bark, leaf shapes, their ancient forms and diverse variety. We have to cherish our trees and woodlands and



Courtesy of Claudia de Yong

**Designer Claudia has appreciated the value of plants from an early age**

I'm pleased the government appear to be acknowledging their value by investing in urban planting schemes and initiatives for woodland creation.

## The plant that made me work hardest

Ground elder, *Aegopodium podagraria*, has cost me a fortune in time and money. I couldn't begin to add up the hours I've spent attempting to completely rid flower beds of it for good. The rhizomes regenerate from the tiniest fragment and flourish anywhere, muscling in and choking other plants.

## The plant I'd like to grow more of when I have a garden again

Probably an odd choice for most people, but I love the delicate pale pink toadflax, *Linaria purpurea* 'Canon Went', which

just keeps on flowering. It's wonderful for attracting bees to the garden and self-seeds in tiny cracks in paving.

## The plant I am in human form

More than likely I'd be a cranesbill geranium. I can look a bit straggly and unloved, too, at times, particularly my hair which frizzes so much and I often look like I've walked out from under a large bush! On both counts nothing that a good 'chop' can't put right though!

## The plant that helped shape my life

My gardening career started following an invite from a water garden nursery to design and build a water garden at the 2002 RHS Hampton Court Flower

## Claudia de Yong

**Occupation:** Garden designer, consultant and writer

**Gardening type:** They call me the 'romantic' gardener, at my happiest in waders!

Show. Having had very little experience of water plants and their habitat, I quickly began to understand them and fell in love with anything water related. If you know me you'll know I'm happiest in my waders, partly submerged in a pond!

## The plant I'd always give as a gift

More than likely it would be the catmint, nepeta 'Walker's Low'. It keeps blooming when chopped back, is attractive to bees, loves the company of other plants, can be kept in a pot, planted out in a border or used as low hedging. It's truly a multi-purpose plant. What more could you ask for?

## Made for the shade

Plants that are adaptable and thrive in shade or sun are valuable. Ones that don't take up much room are doubly so. Both these plants like moist soil and dappled shade. They're ideal for a narrow border or in pots and are available from [www.crocus.co.uk](http://www.crocus.co.uk); tel: 01344 578111. *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Little Spooky' grows to just 50cm (1¾ft) tall, and 40cm (1½ft) wide, but it flowers for several months over summer. Price: £24.99/3-litre pot. *Hakonechloa macra* 'Sunflare' is a slow-spreading, deciduous grass with arching, yellow foliage in spring that develops crimson tips as the season progresses. This effect gets bolder in stronger light. H/S: 45cm (1½ft). Price: £7.99/9cm (3½in) pot.



**Hydrangea paniculata 'Little Spooky'**

Photo: Crocus



**Hakonechloa macra 'Sunflare'**