

‘She makes me laugh and she helps with things like digging, right next to where I’m digging’

Dogs are a gardener’s best friend. Photographer Andrew Maybury meets four horticulturalists and their hounds to discover what makes the relationship so special

I love dogs and I love gardens, so when Bloom asked me to photograph gardeners with their dogs, I jumped at the chance. I work with some fantastic people, and when those people also happen to have a dog, or three, so much the better.

My own dog Stanley is a handful with masses of character. He’s the amalgamation of two highly energetic working gundogs: a German wirehaired pointer and a Hungarian wirehaired vizsla. If you know either of these breeds you’ll know that is quite a combination. Stanley is the kind of dog I often find myself apologising for. He keeps everyone entertained though, and he really is the most handsome chap.



Jekka McVicar and Tansy of Jekka’s Herb Farm

Like Monty Don, I’ve had golden retrievers for I don’t know how long – they’re lovely. Tansy is my third and she’s seven now. She is comfy: she’s someone you can talk to, she makes me laugh and she helps with things like digging, right next to where I’m digging. I love the fact that she’s there, she stays near me, and she’ll notice things that I don’t notice, like birds and definitely squirrels. She is very relaxed and very good, but she’s incredibly fast. If I say ‘squirrel’, she’s gone. She zooms off.

When I’m working in the glasshouse, I don’t need the radio on or anything, I’ve got Tansy sleeping by my side. And if I’m talking to myself about a problem I’ve hit, she’ll look up at me and join in, and then go back to sleep again. It’s really about companionship. We’re best friends. ➔



Mark Diacono and Harris *of Otter Farm*

Harris is mostly a charming hindrance when I'm working outdoors, sneaking off to where he shouldn't when I'm distracted, commando crawling into the sun to overheat when I've left him in the shade... We have a playful, fun time, but as a border terrier he comes with an excellent degree of cheek, and that playfulness can easily stray into wilfulness, so we have our battles, which, of course, he usually wins.

Gardening is often a solitary pastime – one of the things I love very much about it – but a dog gives you quiet companionship, a presence to share the hours with, one who sees what you see but differently. When I'm outside he encourages me to take my time where otherwise I might rush, and he is the excuse to go out for walks (which is when many ideas and solutions fall into my brain). We are neither 'doing' something nor are we not: we are quietly aware of each other and what is going on around us. He seems more content sitting outside than inside and I am much happier with him being there. ➔



Morag is angelic and laidback and Maud is always in trouble and exactly where she shouldn't be, doing exactly what she shouldn't be doing

Grace Alexander, Maud, Morag and Hugo of Gather

Being a gardener's dog is much like being a gardener. It requires a commitment to spending time outdoors in all weathers and an intimate knowledge of a very specific piece of ground. If I'm honest, Hugo is the only true gardener's dog among my pack; if it doesn't involve picnics or walks, Maud and Morag would far rather be asleep on the sofa. Hugo wants to be with me wherever I am, even if it means getting cold and wet as I weed the roses or dig in tulips.

We are a family. Morag and Maud are aunt-and-niece Irish setters and look identical, but they could not be more different. Morag is angelic and supremely laidback and Maud is always in trouble and exactly where she shouldn't be, doing exactly what she shouldn't be doing. Hugo is a cocker spaniel and so believes he is the boss of the world; he expends a lot of time, effort and noise trying to keep the girls in line. Being twice his size, they just bat him on the head with their paws and drive him demented. I do think I am the leader of the pack, but I can see why it might not always look that way from the outside.



Alison Jenkins and Twiggy of Damson Farm

I feel really fortunate that Twiggy has such an amiable nature and she fits into my working life so easily. She's immensely characterful with a playful spirit, but we read each other quite well so she knows when I'm busy and it's time to settle down.

On the days when my work keeps me mostly at my desk there are times when fitting a dog walk into the day feels like a stretch, but I'm always glad once I'm out the door and heading across the fields. Our familiar routes along the stream or up into the woods connect me with the landscape and wildlife beyond the garden and I know I wouldn't make the time to be out there nearly so often if it wasn't for her.

Irish terriers are supposed to be enthusiastic ratters but she definitely skipped that gene: the rodent family living in our compost bins seems comfortably settled. **b**