

Me and my garden: 'It is our cat's jungle'

Jennifer Lee, potter, south London

Non Morris

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📷 Jennifer Lee: 'I gaze at the garden more than I realise.' Photograph: Sophia Evans for the Guardian

The feeling of green and space is important. My studio is an old extension built into a small south London garden. I wanted the garden to be dense, lush, jungle-like. I love the bamboos from woodland around Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural park in Japan, where I was an artist in residence. I love the skeletons of the enormous leaves and the way they wrap the trees with rushes in winter to protect them.

Twenty-six years ago, this garden was full of builders' rubble and there was a red carpet (possibly a Wilton) that still appears from time to time when digging. Now we have a place to sit where I dry clay in the summer.

The planting is a mix and match of things given to me or brought back from the Aberdeenshire farm where I grew up: bluebells, moss, honeysuckle and montbretia. Also a job lot of plants bought for almost nothing. The winter jasmine has fantastic gnarled stems like vertical roots. Another heavenly scented jasmine rambles over the trellis and spills across my studio window. It's our cat, Ninja's, jungle.

I gaze at the garden more than I realise. There are dioramas made by my husband Jake [Tilson, also an artist], from riveted metal found in New York, and cast concrete chickens by his mother, Jos. There are piles of odd stones from meaningful places, oyster shells from Hiroshima, and equisetum and yellow flag irises in metal buckets found in skips. I pin treasures to the fence - rusty blades from the old combine harvester, a piece of verdigris copper.

The garden is mostly greens, although the bluebells did really well this year. I have a green-fingered neighbour whose 16ft banana plants loom over the fence, and I train her black grape and kiwi vines across the garden.

A few years ago, part of our garden slid into a building site behind us. The new wall was stark and intrusive - we bought bamboo and managed to save the jasmine. The evergreen Santa Cruz ironwood tree was perfect because of its height and red bark. In front is the fantastic towering *Euphorbia mellifera*, which I grew from a friend's seedling. The names of plants are not important - it's where they come from that matters.

My favourite spot

Inside the studio, seeing the garden out of the corner of my eye, the door open. When it's really windy, you hear the bamboo and next door's banana leaves. You look out, and it's Jamaica.