

**T**HE late Lady Christie used to enjoy recounting how she was once on the point of offering a gardener employment at Glyndebourne when the candidate suggested that his first job would be to weed the terrace. ‘Weed the terrace?’ must have been a retort worthy of Lady Bracknell. Over several decades, the cracks and fissures between the Yorkstone paving had been colonised by an array of plants that had formed a jewelled tapestry as beautiful, in the chatelaine’s eyes, as any Persian carpet. The man did not get the job.

Allowing, even encouraging, plants to settle into gaps in paving and steps is a hallmark of many British country-house pavements and terraces. Plants soften the hard edges of paths and temper expanses of paving. The informal, disorderly, even romantic mood this creates might be seen as the forerunner of modern naturalistic planting styles. The atmosphere it creates is of a place long rooted into the soil, comfortable and at ease with itself.

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Sometimes, this is achieved consciously, but usually it is happenstance: unexpected delights blowing in on the wind and seeding themselves about. There is an irresistible charm to these cheeky plants that is seldom found elsewhere in the garden. A plant that can insinuate itself into, and flourish in, the smallest crevice deserves to be left there.

Although time, patience and serendipity are the authors of this effect, a few simple interventions can speed the process along, even in newly laid areas. Widening gaps between paving slabs and removing the occasional one will provide spaces for small plants. Sowing seeds into gaps or transplanting seedlings into them will shortcut the wait for the birds and the wind to do the job.

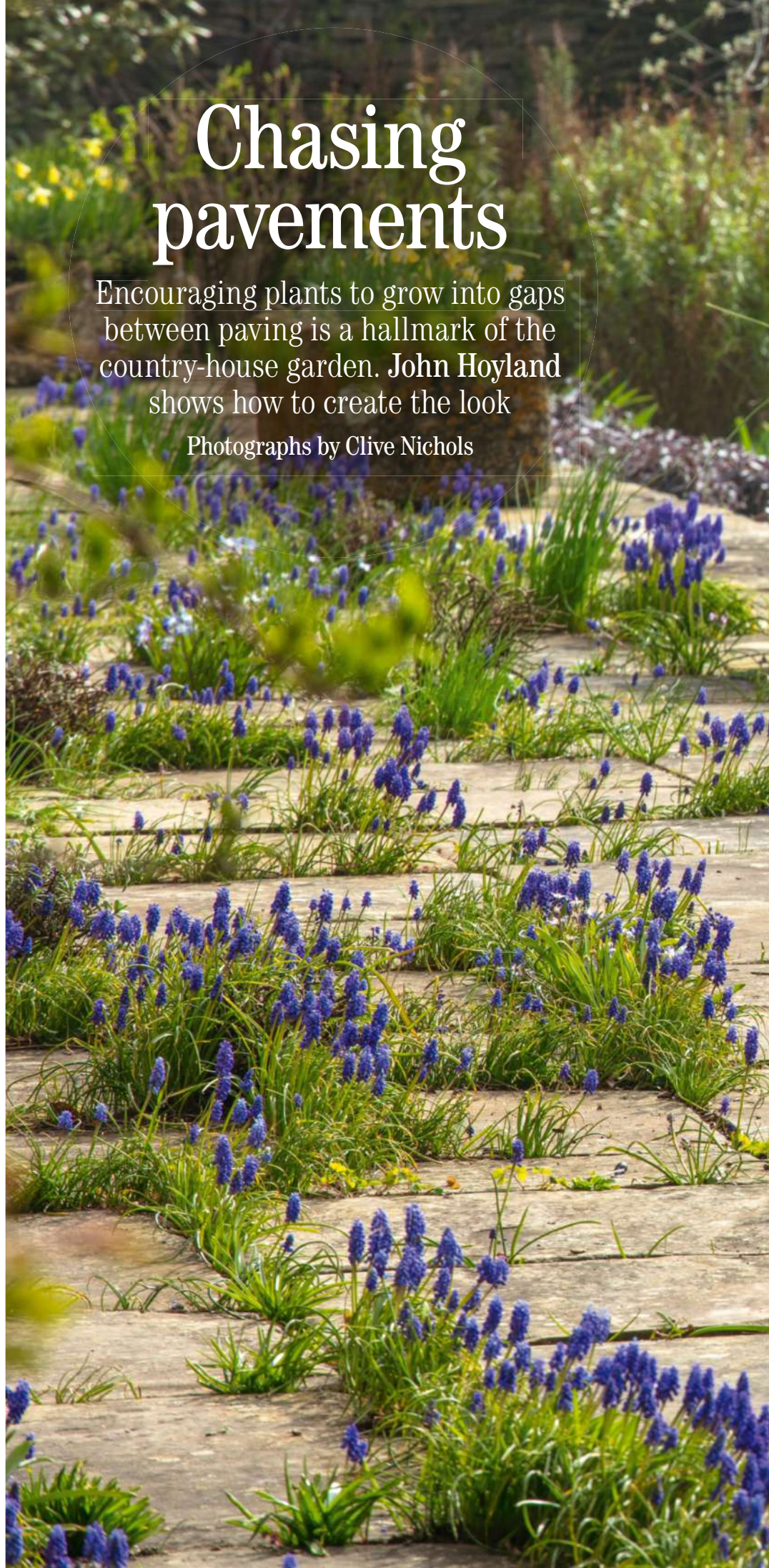
This relaxed approach to paving is not suitable for every garden. Those with formal or minimalist gardens that rely on sharp lines and clean surfaces will not welcome the intrusion of interlopers. The rest of us, however, can sit back and admire the joys of the haphazard. →

**Blue wave:** a form of the grape hyacinth, *Muscari armeniacum*, has spread by seeds and bulbils along the gaps between stone slabs. Edging their way into the few chinks left uncolonised by the muscari are aquilegias and euphorbias

# Chasing pavements

Encouraging plants to grow into gaps between paving is a hallmark of the country-house garden. John Hoyland shows how to create the look

Photographs by Clive Nichols











**Daisy chain:** the pretty little Mexican daisy, *Erigeron karvinskianus*, is one of the most widespread and attractive plants used to colonise paths and pavings. It is a floriferous and long-flowering perennial with pink and white daisies that, in this garden, brighten an otherwise bleak terrace. If you look closely, you'll see a few violas have gate-crashed the party





**Cut and thrust:** in this example, an entire slab has been removed from the terrace and the area planted with tulips. These will be followed by a shrubby perovskia and the silver foliage of the giant sea holly, *Eryngium giganteum*. Both like well-drained soil. A space has been left between the paving and the wall and filled with a mixed planting that will soften the edge of the terrace



**Pocket squares:** the stone slabs have been laid tightly together and the plants confined to areas where slabs have not been laid. The effect is of a clean terrace, with pockets of exuberance. The *Verbena bonariensis* is probably an unplanned seedling →





**Thrift work:** here, space has been left on the treads of wooden steps and between the stepping stones to allow sea thrift, *Armeria maritima*, to be planted. The thrift has also begun to seed itself into crannies between the stones



**Fine gravel:** smart, cut-stone slabs have been surrounded by fine gravel in this elegant garden. A border of euphorbia, geum and short grasses falls into the path to relieve its sharp lines. Chives are beginning to creep through the gravel, too

## Cracking advice

Seeds of plants that you want to introduce into paving can simply be sprinkled into gaps, watered and left to their own devices. To give them a fighting chance, remove old soil or jointing material, mix the seed with a loam-based compost and refill the hole, gently pressing the soil in with a piece of wood or the handle of an old spoon. There are no special tools for this and it is fiddly work, but the results will be worth the extra effort. After sowing, water gently, taking care not to wash away the soil

**Encouraging bulbs to colonise paving requires patience. Lifting a slab and planting a few bulbs will start the**

**process. Small bulbs, such as muscari, *Ipheion uniflorum* and scillas are prolific self-seeders. Among the species tulips, *Tulipa turkestanica* and forms of *T. clusiana* are the most likely to spread**

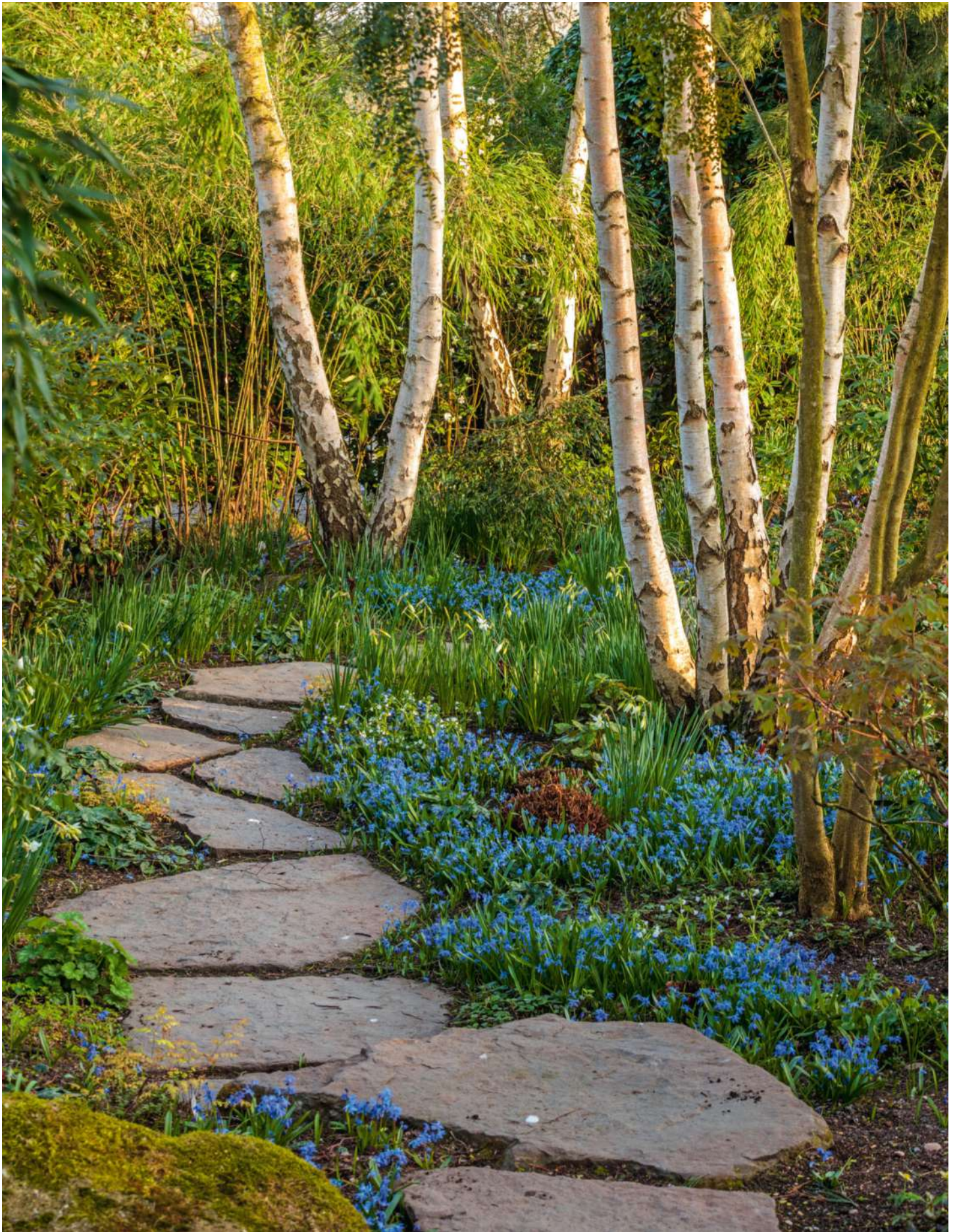
Search out unusual plants at specialist alpine nurseries. The generally poor soil and good drainage under paving is ideal for many alpine plants, such as miniature dianthus, saxifrages, erodiums, primulas and lewisias. Some nurseries have inspirational displays of alpine pavements

**Unwanted seedlings that appear in paving are easily removed, but some plants are thugs and should be avoided. *Soleirolia soleirolii*, known as baby's tear or mind-your-own-business,**

**might, at first, look attractive against a stone pavement, but it will quickly move to lawns and borders, where it is impossible to eradicate without strong weedkillers or replacing the turf. *Euphorbia cyparissias* is similarly invasive. Both plants are occasionally recommended as suitable for growing in paving, but both of them should be given a wide berth**

Plants will not grow on terraces that are laid on concrete slabs. When having new paving laid, make sure that it is being placed on a porous substrate that will let water drain away and allow plants to search for soil and moisture. Leave spaces to be used as planting holes between newly laid slabs





**Borderlands:** the inky-blue flowers of *Scilla siberica* crowd along the borders of a woodland path and are beginning to move into the cracks between the pavers, which have been laid directly into the soil. Other little shade lovers would work well here, too 🌿