

Real Homes
CASE STUDY

WOW-FACTOR FAMILY GARDEN

Sarah and William Murch have combined a love of gardening, swimming and wildlife to create an outdoor space for all to enjoy

WORDS LINDSAY BLAIR PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS



The pool is enjoyed by all the family, pets included, during the spring, summer and autumn months

THE OWNERS

Sarah Murch, a garden designer, lives here with her husband William, a horticulturalist, and their five children, Sam, 26, Hannah, 24, Isabel, 17, Chester, 15, George, 13, and more than 70 animals, including dogs, goats, pigs, sheep, birds, chickens, horses, geese, guinea fowl and cattle.

THE PROPERTY

A seven-bedroom detached farmhouse near Doncaster, North Nottinghamshire

SARAH LOVES

Visiting Northumberland
Making and eating homemade goat's cheese
Planting irises and grasses
The colour green
Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf

TOTAL PROJECT COST

£156,000

AFTER

NATURAL DESIGN

Above The location of the pool was key, as Sarah wanted to be able to see the water when standing in the kitchen, but preferred the deck area to be hidden behind tall grasses

BLANK CANVAS

Right Originally an open field with rough ground and overgrown grass, the garden needed a lot of groundwork before the transformation could begin in June 2010

BEFORE



For Sarah and William Murch, gardening is their work, passion and a way to share time with family, friends and the wildlife surrounding their home. Once a bare plot, they have transformed the space into a family-friendly sanctuary filled with year-round interest and areas for people and wildlife to enjoy.

'We bought the house in 2008 because we wanted more space for our growing family of seven, and to provide a home for more animals,' says Sarah. 'The property came on the market, and, with 11 acres of land, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to create our dream family home and garden just down the road from where we lived.'

Once moved in, the couple's attention soon turned to

the garden – a five-acre overgrown field – which, as Sarah says, 'you couldn't even walk a horse over, it was so boggy'. There was a lot of work to do to turn it into a thriving garden, with a natural pool at the heart of the design.

'We spent around two years planning, clearing the ground and building boundary fences and enclosures,' she recalls. 'I knew I wanted to incorporate a large pool that I could see from the house, but I agonised over the design. I spent weeks assessing sun and wind patterns, standing in the kitchen at an easel and sketching out ideas.'

In 2010, the couple finalised plans for a 300 square metre, 2.75 metre-deep, long pool with angled edges. A team from Ensata, a natural pool company set up by Sarah, William and landscape specialist Andrew Watkinson, ►



THE COSTS AND CONTACTS

Pool construction,
decking and planting
£156,000

TOTAL
£156,000*

Landscaping, pool, materials
and construction Ensata, 01909
485621, ensata.co.uk
Plants Osberton Nurseries,
01909 485 621, osberton.co.uk



‘Seeing family, friends and animals enjoy the garden makes all the effort worth it’



ANIMAL LOVERS

Above Sarah with daughter Hannah, and her rare-breed Golden Guernsey goats, Daphne, Angelica, Heather and Violet, each named after a flower in the garden

MIXED TEXTURES

Left Beds are thickly planted to offer year-round interest and to help mulch the ground, stopping weeds growing. The rich soil means grasses and perennials, grow tall

helped to remove 450 cubic metres of soil and build a concrete block structure lined with fleece and plastic, with rumbled limestone to form the walls and steps into the water. The new structure was filled with tap water, filtered through a specialist system, and the edges planted with reeds and waterlilies, taking six months to complete.

Nothing went to waste: the soil dug from the pool was used to create beds and raise the level of the surrounding ground to create a camber, which drains rainwater away from it. ‘Running groundwater can carry phosphate, which promotes algae, so we had to raise the land. The pool is actually a metre higher than the house,’ says Sarah.

Keeping the water clean is crucial, so there’s a clear distinction between a regeneration area filled with reeds, which filter the water and entice wildlife, and the swimming section. A mechanical system also constantly transports water into a nearby pump house to be filtered and fed back into the pool through jets and millstones. ‘These are angled in the same direction as the wind and push any debris towards the far side of the pool where it’s collected,’ she explains.

The decking is cleverly positioned to make the most of the evening sun, and is also a vantage point from where you can often see swallows swooping to catch flies on the water’s surface, newts and dragonfly. ‘There’s always something to keep you entertained,’ says Sarah. ‘Plus,

the dogs, geese and pigs like to take a dip, too. When the pool was first installed, there was a strict “no-animal” rule, but that didn’t last long!’

Elsewhere, a bog garden near to a beach area by the pool is planted with grasses, azaleas and rhododendrons, and provides shelter for amphibians. Behind the pool lies a meadow filled with wildflowers, and an avenue of crab apple trees leading to a forest planted for daughter Hannah’s 21st birthday. There’s also a rose garden, and an education area where local schoolchildren can come and learn about plants and insects. Look closely and you’ll find a sunken trampoline hidden behind grasses, insect and bird boxes, a willow maze made by Sarah, and beyond that, pens for rare-breed Golden Guernsey goats, ponies, chickens and cattle.

The garden is always evolving: although most of the design was finished by 2011, Sarah and William are constantly adding to it, introducing more colour and texture. In just six years, the couple have completely transformed their plot and welcomed guests into their home, as they’ve opened the garden to visitors during the summer months, holding workshops and coffee mornings. ‘This project has been and is a real joy, it brings me happiness every day,’ says Sarah. ‘Being in the garden is my ultimate luxury. It takes a lot of time to care for the plot, wildlife and family, but seeing the children and animals outside, using the space, makes all the effort worthwhile.’

PERFECT VIEWS

Above and right Seating areas surround the pool so the family can enjoy the garden from all aspects. The decking is Siberian larch from a local builders’ merchant and the British-made deckchairs are from Hen & Hammock. Teak lounge chairs, Cyan

*INDICATES PRICE FOR A SIMILAR POOL AND PLANTING DESIGN. SARAH AND WILLIAM DID A LOT OF THE WORK THEMSELVES THROUGH THEIR NATURAL POOLS BUSINESS AND RECEIVED REDUCTIONS FROM GARDENING CONTACTS

