

Horny handed sons of the soil

On the eve of the Chelsea Flower Show **Rawdon Messenger** finds out what is so attractive about gardening for a living

AS a glance around Chelsea Flower Show this week reveals, the British are not only obsessed by gardening but also rather good at it. But, when characters such as Alan Titchmarsh and Monty Don are its most famous practitioners, when the work is often dirty and tough and when you consider English weather, you may still wonder why gardening is such a popular profession. It is now not only cool to have a gardener but also to be one. From burnt-out City brokers to young entrepreneurs, Londoners are turning to it as an alternative career. Many fall into the

business by accident but are soon passionate about their work. What's the big attraction?

"Jobs don't come any more satisfying," is one answer. For many it has the perfect combination of outdoor physical work with intellectual stimulation. Results are there to be seen and enjoyed. Another is their popularity. From window boxes to the great parks Londoners love greenery. Yet few possess the time or skill to keep a lawn let alone a herbaceous border. Good gardeners have become prized and protected (they are often fully booked for months). With such massive demand for the green-fingered, a career in horticulture can be busy and lucrative.



Caspar Gabb, 28, Landscape designer and gardener

After studying art, and with a degree in interior design, Caspar realised this was not his calling. Drawn by the sunshine and fresh air, he took a summer job as a labourer for a large gardening contractor. "Within 2 weeks I was besotted. I knew if I could make it through my first English winter I'd be hooked".

With two and a half years practical experience, a diploma in plantsmanship from Chelsea Physic Garden, and his design background, Caspar started Natural Elements two years ago. "I provide a full service: conception, implementation and maintenance. I aim to produce a balance of nature with strong contemporary design." Business has been booming and all by word of mouth. The job has taken him to Italy and even South Africa.

Success is not based on pure flower power. To survive, budgets and logistics must be carefully planned. "I learnt the project management side by experience. I once spent two happy days moving six tonnes of soil off a street with only a bucket!" Building gardens means long gruelling hours. But Caspar is not phased. "Just seeing the design come to life makes all the toil worth it."

Caspar's future seems rosy. He plans to continue creating ground-breaking gardens. "I'll be planting daisies until I'm pushing them up!"

Photos:
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