

Monet's Garden
My Internship May 2026
- Lizzie-May Amos

About the Author

My name is Lizzie-May, I'm a horticulturist and artist currently living in the creative and vibrant town of Frome, Somerset.

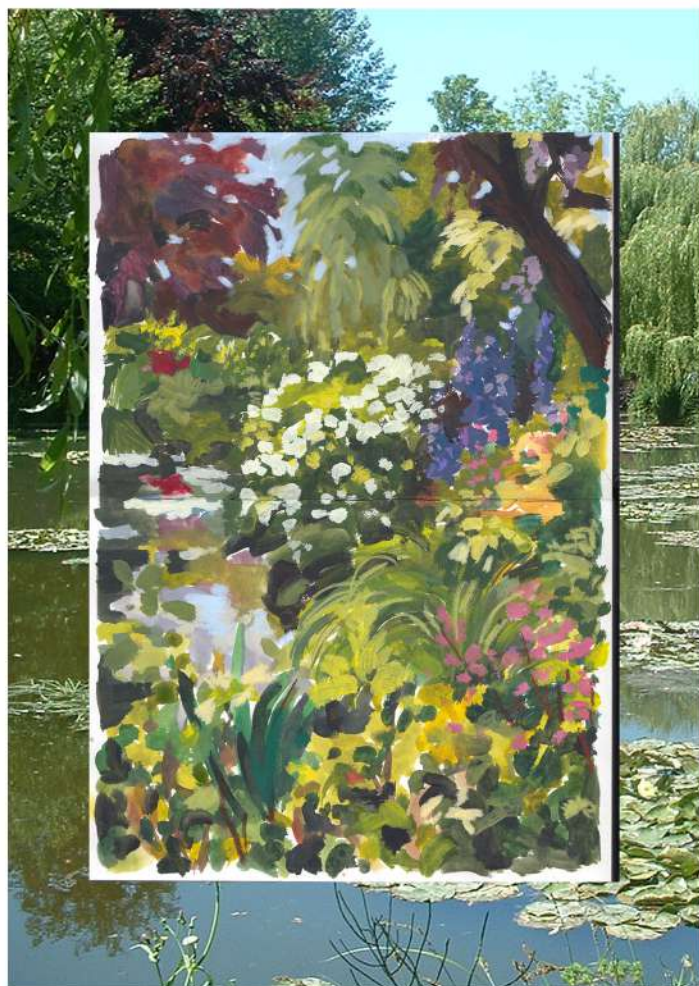
I'm a career shifter into the world of horticulture that's been driven by an instinctual need to connect with nature on a deeper level. Another motivator is my background as an artist. After years of studying art and trying out various different mediums and muses, the landscape became my favourite to study and paint; finding fascination and joy in plant diversity, colours, textures and a variety of scenes from cultivated ornamental gardens to wilder woodland and coastal areas.

My horticultural career began 2 years ago with a National Trust apprenticeship. I worked and studied in two arts-and-crafts style gardens alongside a team of talented gardeners and volunteers.



Prior to this, I didn't have much experience at all, so it was all a huge learning curve. It was a fantastic way to begin my horticulture career and gave me vast plant knowledge, practical skills and a deep appreciation for thoughtful, artistic planting.

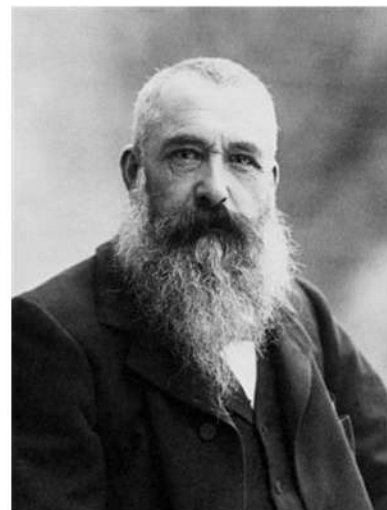
After my apprenticeship ended, I wanted to expand my skills even further and heard about the internship program at Monet's Garden through my college lecturer at the time. I had always wanted to visit the garden but had never considered the possibility of working and being part of the gardens history! This was a rare opportunity to combine my love for art and horticulture. Ultimately, it felt like a natural continuation of everything I had been working towards.



Aims and Objectives

Monet's Garden operates on a scale far beyond anything I've worked on before. During May (the month I visited), the team lifts 32,000 tulip bulbs and begins the huge undertaking of replanting the beds from Spring to Summer designs.

Jean-Marie Avisard, the head gardener, describes the team as gardening "in the spirit of the Impressionist artist," approaching the garden as Monet did his canvases: as a painter of light, working with sun and shade, warm and cool colour. This philosophy is one I find deeply inspiring and excites me tremendously.



Alongside the practical experience of working at scale, I hoped to encounter a far broader plant range, learn about planting combinations and seasonal transitions during the pivotal time of May. I also wanted to learn from the gardeners working there how they look after such a prestigious garden. It felt like such a huge honor to have the opportunity to gain insight into the day-to-day care of the garden whilst also paying homage to its rich history.

The dates in which I worked in the gardens spanned from May 2nd 2026 - June 1st 2026.

Introduction

Monet's Garden is split into 3 sectors; Le Clos Normand West and Le Clos Normand East; home to the beautiful and abundant garden that runs alongside Monet's pink-rendered house with iconic 'Paris Green' shutters.

In this garden you'll find formal beds planted with an array of perennials, biennials and annuals. During the late spring season, a wash of irises frame the visitors paths, beds of roses create the most magical scent and on the East side, colour boxes span the length of the enclosed garden, as if paints on a palette, creating a gradient from cooler to warmer tones. The central path is lined with fragrant roses and nasturtiums, that gradually trail to meet one another as if they were long lost lovers.





The third sector is Le Jardin d'eau; the famous Japanese-inspired water garden home to Monet's collection of water lilies. This garden has a distinctly different feel with its oriental influence shown through its selection of plants. Thickets of bamboo's line the ponds edge and there are established trees such as ginkgo biloba, maples varying in acid greens and reds, weeping willows and Japanese tree peonies. The iconic bridge is framed with both white and purple Wisteria and the pond (which is more the size of a lake) beautifully mirrors the atmospheric sky of Giverny.

In addition to the 3 sectors I have already mentioned, there is a 4th which is perhaps the most critical to the upkeep of the garden; the glasshouse and polytunnel production. The scale of the production is unlike anything I have ever seen before. There is one main large glasshouse with overhead irrigation and sliding benches that are packed head-to-toe with a range of summer bedding plants. A bench that draws me in is packed with a forest of salvias ranging in so many varieties I could spend hours just reading all the labels.



Next the polytunnels, of which there has to be at least 7, possibly more - all with built in irrigation and full to the brim with plants - mostly annuals. These are all grown by seed and tended to by the team until they have reached maturity and sit waiting patiently for their time to shine.

My First Impressions

My first impressions of the garden, after an incredibly warm welcome by Jan Huntley (head of internships and artist residencies), was incredibly surreal. I had seen images on the internet, even painted from references before but nothing could have prepared me for the overwhelming beauty and intimacy of this artists garden.

I am immediately emotionally speechless, how a garden like this can truly exist? My eyes struggle to focus as the abundance of flora and fauna- it is almost too much to take in. The borders in front of the house are so densely planted with varying heights of alliums, lilies, pansies, myosotis and tulips. I adore the mixture of pansies and myosotis which in many contexts are planted only at the front of the border, but here they take up space throughout, creating the most visually-striking display with true depth.



Dusky pink tulips and delicate blue myosotis line the beds opposite the house, as Jan explains the unusually hot temperates have advanced the life cycle of the tulips in particular. These beds will later become one of the most exciting challenges of my month here.



We walk through Le Clos Normand, roses are suspended above on metal frames and beautiful tree's such as yew, pleached limes and the glimpse of a copper beech from Le Jardin d'eau result in a totally immersive experience. The vegetation feels like a warm embrace. There's a stunning selection of bearded irises that make me want to squeal in delight as we walk to the bottom of the garden to admire the Grande Allée (central path). Roped off to visitors, the height of the rose arches and the width of the path make it such a spectacular viewpoint. The nasturtiums are yet to be planted at this stage but the borders boast gorgeous tones of purples and pinks with the most wonderful display of globe shaped alliums, honesty and towering eremurus.

The colour boxes as mentioned previously, are one of my favorite parts of Le Clos Normand. I just adore the creativity of the selection of plants to keep in tones of the colour swatches - whether that be through the flowers, the leaves or both. The purples draw me in as I admire the selection that includes borage, lavender, baptisia, clematis, scabious and geranium to name a few!

We venture through the gates to Le Jardin d'eau and it really does feel like I'm walking into a secret garden. Similar to Le Clos Normand, this space feels truly enclosed but through the striking tree selection that lines the pond. There are so many hues of green which sit beautifully with the selection of acers and colorful shrubs that hug the waters edge. I'm hit with a familiar sense of home when I see the path of rhododendrons and azaleas that remind me of my childhood in Cornwall.

It is a delight to see the continuation of planting from Le Clos Normand and how in such a different setting, there are parallels through the choices of annuals such as pansies and myosotis between the bolder, older perennials. Jan tells me that one of the water lilies has flowered, a month earlier than usual and they will continue to bloom further into my time here.

My First Week

My first two days are based in Le Clos Normand East as I'm fully thrown into the early morning routine of raking gravel and deadheading tulips, camassia's, spent irises and anything that looks like it's about to go over. I assume that this is the behind-the-scenes work of keeping the gardens aesthetics to such a high standard before the visitors arrive. We also delve into some weeding (which on the surface goes unnoticed) but as I kneel down, my eyes acclimatise and realise the scale of this job. It's a nice calming way to start the week, it gives me the opportunity to get to know my colleagues through broken French and study some of the planting combinations more closely.



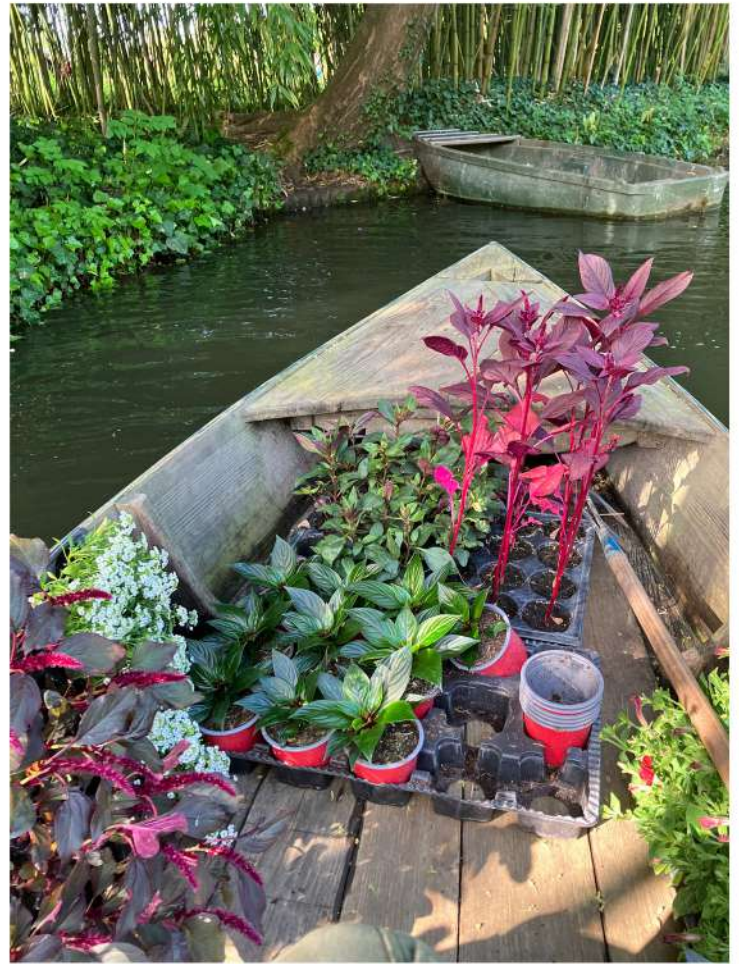
I soon learn the unpredictability of Normandy weather as dramatic skies soon arrive that threaten to soak us - retreating to help the glasshouse production team. We work on potting up plug plants into larger containers which are colour coded according to the colour of the bloom; for ease of selection and planting out later on.

The plugs include *Tropaeolum peregrinum* 'Canary Creeper', various *Ipomoea*, *Thunbergia alata* 'Sunrise' and *Dolichos* 'Ruby Moon'.

Later in the week I join Le Jardin d'eau team and the true excitement begins as the beds start to be replaced. We begin by digging out the pansies, wallflowers and other spring bedding plants before granular fertiliser is spread and watered in. We start placing out the plants that include cosmos, impatiens and salvias amongst the already established campanula, oriental poppies and ferns. All plants are repeated according to the autonomy of the gardener, often working from smaller to larger to ensure the area is full and varied. I was amazed at how many plants are packed into the bed, and at such tight spaces! It really is a maximum flower-power aesthetic.

The highlight of my first week was going out on the boat with gardener Emmanuel Porc (Manu) with the plants intended for the bank below the border we had been tending to.

Manu and I both took turns to anchor the boat to the bank whilst the other planted the selection of petunias, begonias, impatiens, amaranthus and salvias in a random, repeating design. All of which had a low-growing habit which would beautifully frame the edges of the pond. This was such an exciting and satisfying job to do and such a unique opportunity!



Lastly, another job in the pond garden that I was introduced to was navigating the boat. The job involved standing and using the net to steer and scoop out the algae and leaves.

A super intimidating but equally meditative process; cleaning between the water lilies to create that mirror-like reflection that Monet loved to paint so much. Manu described the importance of cleaning the pond regularly, especially when it's cloudy as the surface appears more flat and shows the debris more.

My Second Week

Outside of working hours, and opening hours, I had the opportunity to come and see the garden which really came to life during sunset. Jan explained to me that the garden is cleverly laid out in accordance to the compass points. Cooler colours are accentuated by shade whilst the hotter colours are placed to capture the last of the sun's golden rays at the end of the day. This incredible reference to light and shade embodies the thoughtfulness and intentional planting that Monet worked so hard to create.

This week marked the end of the beautiful tulip and forget me not displays outside of the house. The whole gardening team came together to begin at an earlier time of 7am on a misty morning to start clearing the beds. We loaded up the tractor trailer with the tulips and forget me nots and dug through the beds meticulously to prepare them for the next stage. There was a real adrenaline rush and team-spirit feeling as everyone worked together knowing that they had to be replanted before visitors arriving at 9am.

800 plus pelargoniums were placed (pinks, reds and whites) spacing them carefully so they had room to grow but not so much that it left an empty gap. The pace at which the gardeners worked was incredible as we all focused on the task at hand, finishing off the gravel areas with rakes and blowers to clear plant debris. What a fantastic team effort.



Other tasks we did this week included weeding and planting summer bulbs (lilies, gladioli, tigridia) in Le Clos Normand East, including the Grande Allée and colour boxes. The Grande Allée will eventually be planted with dahlias and so spacing of bulbs was specific to allow room for these. Later on we began clearing space for these by pulling out the tulips and pansies half way down to make the process gradual. Two English yew trees frame the Grande Allée and so we planted two types of impatiens underneath the shadier canopy areas - white and red. Next began the planting of dahlias and nasturtiums in the spaces created, feeding the dahlias with granular feed to give them an extra boost.



Rémi Lecoutre (deputy head gardener) showed me how to look after the irises depending on their flowering condition; either deadheading individual buds carefully or on a totally spent stem, snapping at the base of the plant.

Some reflections from this week included:

- Peonies and lupins are looking incredible
- We weeded and thinned out asters and persicarias in colour boxes to keep clumps contained
- Saw the coastal silene uniflora, which I have seen in Cornwall - planting here is so diverse and unexpected
- Lots of bulbs we are planting are from South African origin
- Lots of questions from visitors about the gladioli, common variety
- The cuckoo is incredibly noticeable day and night in Giverny!

My Third Week

This week I began working with Claire H  l  ne Marron (head gardener of Le Clos Normand West), continuing the clearance of pansies and wallflowers, leaving the emerging summer bulbs and glorious foxgloves that can be found in this section. Planting combinations in these hot borders included dahlias, impatiens, abutilon, calendula, amaranthus and zinnias.



A highlight was when Claire H  l  ne asked me if I would create some cut flower displays in small bud vases for a private dinner at the house that evening. Of course I leaped at the idea and adored this time to cut flowers for creative display. My selection included silene, pansies, peonies, salvias, dianthus, variegated ground elder flowers (which is used as a border plant here) myosotis (pink, blue) amongst a few more.

Later in the week we worked to clear one of my favourite beds under the pleached lime trees which was to be planted with a blue, purple and white colour theme. Claire H  l  ne and I went to the poly tunnels to select the plants and it was honestly the most exciting day with an array of plant choice so vast all I can compare it to is being a child at Disneyland.

I was grateful to be given autonomy to select plants to complement Claire's choices that would result in a soft, harmonious bed.

Examples we chose included ageratum (blue and white), nicotiana, petunia, verbena bonariensis, scabiosa, impatiens and a range of salvias including the variety uliginosa. These would complement the existing plants such as hebes, monarda, silene and digitalis.

Plenty of watering was required this week as we were welcomed with a heatwave with temperatures of 30 degrees celsius and climbing.

My Fourth Week

I began the week working in Le Jardin d'eau deadheading with Manu. It was interesting to learn the approach to the different sectors, and in this garden the approach was definitely more of a 'light-touch' to compliment it's slightly wilder plant palette. We picked individual spent flowers and only weeded what we could reach with extendable secateurs, leaving anything that meant trampling on the beds.

I was getting more confident at cleaning the pond, and was told to really make sure to get in between the lily pad leaves - a slightly daunting experience as at this point a lot of the flowers were beginning to bloom! Being in the boat and floating around was such a special experience and allowed me time to appreciate the garden as a whole, admiring from the inside out.

Highlights of what were flowering in my 4th week in Le Jardin d'eau included: campanulas, digitalis, clematis, rhododendron, oriental poppies, lupins, peonies and stand out trees and shrubs such as acacia, continus coggygia, salix babylonica and a variety of acers.

Oxeye daises, campanulas and foxgloves began to flop and so Manu showed me the way in which they like to stake and support these plants with a single thin bamboo and twine for a naturalistic approach.



Back in Le Clos Normand West, we cleared a 20cm gap down the Grande Allée for tithonias which with the nasturtiums, would begin to transform this path from cooler to hotter colours in the late summer. It was incredibly tough planting conditions and the tithonias were incredibly wilted - the thought was that the helianthus in the border could substitute as a worse case scenario.

My final days in the garden were really special, the heat had allowed the hundreds of poppies to bloom each morning with the sunrise on the west side - an absolute treat to see. I even saw the tree peony in Le Jardin d'eau flower on May 30th! We continued gradually clearing, planting and watering more beds before having our last lunch together with drinks and local food to celebrate and say our goodbyes.



My Reflections

My month at Monet's Garden truly magical and beyond anything I could have ever imagined previously. To be part of the gardens history, albeit fleeting, is just surreal to think about. I'd like to thank the team for being so welcoming and sharing their learnings with me.

A few of my favourite reflections include:

- Studying of the planting combinations, the density of planting and the repeating nature of the plants throughout the garden, sensitive to the setting. How broad the plants are from quintessentially cottage style foxgloves, roses and irises to vibrant impatiens, crocosmia and lilies. The colour palettes are bold and unashamedly bright particularly in hot areas, a lot of reds and oranges are seen. The planting in Jardin d'eau is a real mix of everything, from striking red begonias to delicate white cosmos. How perhaps somewhat traditional bedding plants in England such as pansies and petunias are just as integral to the rest of the border design and repeated throughout the width to give interesting height variation.

- The artistic vision Monet had to plant intentional cool and warm colours in accordance to the sun, working with nature to accentuate its beauty even further to the human eye. This is captured again in the pond garden - the reflections from the flora and fauna creating such a beautiful image. It makes me wonder if these were deliberately placed after the pond was constructed with the reflections in mind.

- How the team smoothly transitions the beds with a clear schedule in mind and how everyone comes together to work on larger projects. From the production being prepared with colour coordinating pots to the planning that goes with the seasonal rotations. The gardeners here work incredibly hard and fast to keep up with expectations.

- How Monet was sensitive to the setting and how the garden is designed in aspect to the wider Giverny landscape. Every part of the garden complements the wider landscape, you feel enclosed but still aware of the setting and this is amplified by the pond reflecting the atmospheric skies.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to the following people for making this trip happen:

Laura McArthur, Sarah Holmes, Sam Finch, Jan Huntley and the whole team at Monet's Garden.

And to my fellow interns, Kamala Weaver, Charlotte May Hayden, Saffron Prentis, Froydis Gammelsaeter and Lyriss Richards - it was a joy to share this experience with you.

With special thanks to the Merlin Trust for supporting me financially through this wonderful endeavour!