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Kelly Brook shows us the beauty
and beasties in her own back yard

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**MONTY DON'S SUPERB PARTWORK ON HOW TO TURN
YOUR GARDEN INTO A HAVEN FOR NATURE**

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Kelly in one of her springs and (inset) by the large pond

love it, and the wisteria too because there are so many flowers.'

There are several ponds, including a large, man-made one, naturally fed with water. 'It's my Monet-inspired pond. But the water is still and there's no shade, so it's covered in duckweed. I introduced a fish to eat the weed and now he's absolutely enormous.'

'One of my favourite things is to watch dragonflies bounce up and down on the pond, they're beautiful. The pond is still a bit weedy at the moment, but once we clear it out and all the lilies open in July, it's magical.'

'I used to have a couple of rescue Aylesbury ducks who lived there, but their wings had been clipped and they became so stationary and territorial, none of the wild ducks would visit any more. And the foxes were here every day with their eyes on them. So we sent them away to a happy life on a duck farm.'

'Before they were here, one of the

'In summer my laburnum arch is alive with bees'

wild ducks, who I named Daisy, would waddle up to the back door each spring to announce she'd returned. For two years, she didn't show up, but now the Aylesbury ducks have gone she's back. She comes every March, and waddles up into the kitchen every day. She knows us – I came in once and she was sitting on our sofa.'

Daisy is just one of the characters who keep life interesting for Kelly and Jeremy. 'Because of our schedules and the fact that we travel all the time, we don't really have pets. But we have a little family of four squirrels that live in a tree, two blackbirds that come down, the wild ducks that have just had cute ducklings on the pond, and we've got a mole at the moment making an absolute mess. He digs up my lawn, all we see is a lot of dirt flying up in the air, but I give him the benefit of the doubt, that's he's going to make his mess and then clear off.'

'We've got a couple of pheasants too, it's like a refuge for them. There's so much life and energy constantly. There are natural springs all round the property and there are all sorts of different varieties of newts in there, including the great crested newt, which is a protected species, and frogs and toads, it's lovely.'

There are times when nature can
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to come from 'darkest Africa', before author Michael Bond's agent pointed out that Africa contained no bears



GROW A WILDLIFE GARDEN

The key to happiness is so simple, says Kelly Brook. 'There's little to beat putting a seed in the ground and then seeing it push through the earth and grow and flower. It's the most rewarding thing ever. Also, as a fan of wildlife gardening, I firmly believe in letting nature take its course.'

Hang on a minute. Are there two Kelly Brooks? We all know of the glamorous model-turned-actress and TV presenter, who once topped polls as the Sexiest Woman Alive. So who is this woman who's not afraid to get her hands dirty, this dressed-down nature-lover, in her simple cream shirt worn loose over cotton slacks, her hair in a single plait down her back?

It is Kelly – the real one – and it's not the first time she's managed to confound a visitor in her home. 'When people come to see me, I think they expect crushed velvet sofas and everything dripping in diamanté. But that's not me. I don't want to live in a show home with a show garden. This is my refuge, my escape from the world of show business. This place grounds me, almost literally.'

This refuge, which we're about to take a tour around, is her 15th-century farmhouse in Kent. Kelly, 38, has been dating actor Jeremy Parisi, five years her junior, for three years now and the pair divide their time between his apartment in Paris and this historic home with its garden that's very dear to her heart.

She bought the Wealden hall house – a type of medieval timber-framed construction – for £1 million ten years ago. The main building dates from around 1460 with an oast house added in the 16th or 17th century. It now sports a fine display of wisteria.

During her time here Kelly has transformed the five-acre garden into a paradise of flowers and, more importantly, a haven for all creatures great and small – which means she's excited to hear about Monty Don's brilliant three-part series on how to create a wildlife garden, which begins today in Weekend.

'I think it's a really nice idea to encourage people to help wildlife,' she says. 'You don't need acres and acres of land. Everyone can feed the birds, and can sprinkle wildflower seeds to encourage the bees and help create a nice little habitat for mammals and insects to live.'

Her not-so-little habitat is teeming with life, with everything from moles and squirrels to endangered newts and

There's a nest of baby wrens outside her bedroom window, ducklings on her pond and a tawny owl causing chaos in the kitchen. Kelly Brook on why she's turned her garden into a haven for creatures great and small

This place is my refuge...it grounds me

cheeky ducks finding a home there. It's hard to believe how different things were for its owner a decade ago.

Kelly was living and working in Los Angeles when she spotted a picture of her property online. 'It had lattice windows and roses round the door, a real fairytale house. I asked my mum, Sandra, to go and look at it for me. I was thinking of moving back to the UK. I was brought up in Kent, on a council estate in Chatham,

and my ambition had been to get out and see a bit of the world. In the end, though, it turned out to be that old cliché: you travel the world, then return home to find what you've been looking for.

So I decided to sell my LA house and the one I still owned in Dulwich, London, and move here with my then-boyfriend [actor Billy Zane]. He was never comfortable here. It's very isolated and you've got to love gardening – not a problem for me but he was raised in Chicago and missed the buzz of city life.

'I love waking up to the dawn chorus rather than the roar of traffic. Outside my bedroom window, there's a nest of baby wrens which wake me at 5.30 every morning. But I'm not complaining. It instantly makes me feel connected to nature.'

First she set about fixing up the house, which needed a lot of work. 'I wanted to restore it so you could see its original features. A lot of beams were covered up; there were modern radiators hanging off the walls. So I

had it taken back to its bare bones while discreetly having underground heating installed beneath the new elm floors. Now I describe it as a classic car with a Ferrari engine.'

Kelly then turned her attention to the grounds. 'I worked with a lovely actress and landscape gardener called Lesley Moors, who's married to the actor Alex Jennings. I didn't always do what she recommended but she certainly taught me to be more ruthless than I might otherwise have been. I'm happy to listen to anyone's advice. I have a gardener, Michael, who comes in once a fortnight and he's a fount of knowledge. But this is my garden and it's very personal. I know every plant, where each one comes from and when I planted it.'

So much of what she's added is designed to give birds, bees and other beasties a home. Which means not too much chopping or pruning.

'I think really over-manicured gardens don't lend themselves to a lot

of wildlife. The longer I live here, the more I love letting things go wild. The challenge is to allow the natural flora and fauna to flourish.'

'The orchard is a good example. The meadow next to the trees was covered in grass. But I have a bonfire every year and then wait and watch to see what grows in the new grass that springs up – there'll be poppies, oxeye daisies, wild strawberries, clover and forget-me-nots, which are great for bees and other insects. Rabbits love it; you see them running through the little paths I've had mown.'

'The same has been true of the bank behind the oast house, which used to be covered in blackberry brambles. It was quite a job to rip it all out, but worth it. I've now got pink and red campion, a great source of food for butterflies, and a whole bank of bluebells. They were there all along but they were being suffocated.'

As we talk, Kelly points out the changes she's made. Outside the

kitchen is a natural spring and on the wall a wide variety of roses.

'I tried to grow French lavender in the bed underneath the windowsill but it was the wrong soil.' It was a different story, though, with British Hidcote lavender, which flourished from the word go. 'The butterflies absolutely love the lavender. We have mainly cabbage whites, and at the height of summer you can't really see the purple flowers because they're awash with fluttering white wings.'

The purple pom-pom heads of the alliums are opening now and then it'll be the turn of the irises, followed by achilleas with their flat heads of delicate flowers, which are also a magnet for bees and butterflies.

'I'm trying to teach myself the art of succession so that for most of the year there's some colour and interest for wildlife in the garden,' says Kelly. 'We have a big yellow laburnum arch, in summer it's alive with bees and the sound is amazing. They just





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get a little too close for comfort. Kelly says, 'I once found a frog in my bedroom. I have no idea how it got there. I even googled, "Can frogs climb stairs?" I was lying in bed and I looked on the floor and thought I saw a mouse but it was a frog. That was quite an entertaining night, trying to catch the frog and put him back in the pond.'

'I blame Jeremy, actually, because he caught a frog one day and brought it into bed and said, "Look what I've got," as he opened his hand up. I think the frog liked it in the bedroom and decided to come back up.'

Then there's the invading owl. 'A tawny owl has fallen down the chimney twice. Once I came home from a trip and thought we'd been burgled. The kitchen looked like someone had gone to town with a baseball bat and smashed everything. Then we opened the back door and the owl just sat there looking at me.'

And every year, a swarm of bees lands in the chimney. 'Each time, I just pray they decide to move on. If they stay and build a nest, the honey will drip down the chimney and cause so much damage. Don't get me wrong, I like bees. We put six hives in the orchard and had an expert tell us what to do. In time, we were rewarded with amazing honey. I grow a wildflower called yellow rattle because it attracts the bees.'

There are also creepy-crawlies under every bush, but that's just fine with Kelly. 'We've got lots of snails



Kelly in the pristine potting shed in the garden of her Kent farmhouse

and slugs. Some people hate them, but all these things serve a purpose, as food for the birds. When you see the birds eating them, you realise everything has a reason for being here. When you see the ecosystem at work you come to appreciate every little insect, bug, gnat and fly.'

Kelly does put coconut shells and seed out sometimes, as an extra food source for the birds, but says, 'What's great is that generally all the animals are so self-sufficient.'

Another wandering visitor is a feral

tabby cat with only half a tail. 'I call him Arfur,' says Kelly, 'although I've just discovered he's a she.'

Today, Arfur is following us on our stroll. We've reached the small, formal croquet lawn, which is surrounded by box hedges and a pale pink Maid of Kent rose. The ground is strewn with forget-me-nots and primulas edge the path leading to the kitchen garden.

On the climb to the orchard and meadow is a lime walk – a natural arch of lime trees – from which there's an eastward view across the Isle of

Thanet to Dungeness and the hazily shimmering sea. The pears in the orchard are grown organically. In late summer, they're gathered by a local farmer, pressed, mixed with apples and turned into apple and pear juice.

It's clear from the passion with which Kelly talks that her life has been transformed. 'I used to be out partying and working all hours. I'd come home really stressed, but I'd go into the garden and prune the roses. If you do that in June, you'll get a second flowering in September. After

a couple of hours, I'd feel completely different. There's no doubt gardening is one of the best therapies ever.'

Almost all her reading is gardening books and she's always online looking for ideas. There's a paperback about beekeeping on top of the downstairs loo. She's also a keen cook.

'There's no television. All I do is garden and cook. It's the good life; my version of it, at any rate. I'd never call myself a garden expert. I suppose 'garden enthusiast' would be nearer the mark. I share my thoughts on Instagram and Twitter. I've started presenting a segment on gardening on This Morning on ITV and I'll be doing that over the summer.'

'There's nothing else on TV I want to be a part of at the moment. I don't want to be on a reality show. My dream is to do a gardening programme. I've a lot to learn, but I'm getting there.'

Kelly admits she has become more relaxed. 'A couple of years back, it would have driven me mad to see the grass if it had grown too long. I've learnt to enjoy it more rather than striving to control everything. Beautiful things can come from letting go.'

'I see my role as the caretaker of this bit of paradise. People will come after me and do whatever they want to the garden. In the end, though, nature will always reign supreme. And that's exactly the way it should be.'

Richard Barber

Follow Kelly on Instagram @iamkb and on Twitter @iamkellybrook. See Kelly's gardening segment on ITV's This Morning over the summer.

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