

“Take the *Atropa belladonna*, deadly nightshade,” Robertson says. “Its slightly sweet black berries could be very tempting to eat if you didn’t know what it was. Just telling a young child not to touch something doesn’t do any good. But saying that it belongs to the devil, and if children picked it the devil will come for them might keep them safe.”

“I came up with the idea of developing a poison garden at Bryngwyn Hall after hosting a rather wild foraging course,” says Auriol Marchioness of Linlithgow. “My head gardener Andrea Atherton was very enthusiastic about the concept but I think my children thought I was completely off the wall.”

Lady Linlithgow was quickly captivated by the plants. Even though the garden is only 30-months old it has become her favorite part of the garden.



Lady Auriol Linlithgow shows John Robertson one of the beautiful, but potentially deadly angel trumpets (*Brugmansia*) growing in her garden.

“I’m fascinated by how some entire plants are poisonous but only parts of others are, or how they can be beneficial at one dosage but poisonous at another,” says Lady Linlithgow. “The plants are very beautiful and are growing exceptionally well. It’s a marvelous spot, I’m over the moon with it.”

The poison garden at Bryngwyn Hall was designed to have a mystical, magical feel to it, Lady Linlithgow says. The purpose was to highlight the plant’s healing properties not just their poisonous ones. She uses a natural remedy, prepared by a local herbalist and homeopath from plants harvested in her garden, to control her allergies to goose grass.

“Still Andrea [her gardener] has developed quite a reputation for running the poison garden here,” Lady Linlithgow says. “She was stopped by a man at the supermarket the other day who asked if she was the person in charge of the poison garden. When she confirmed that she was, he asked her if she could tell him how to poison his wife’s lover. She said while she actually could, she wouldn’t.”

Poisonous plants practically never cause fatalities, but there are no end of products derived from plants that do. Just the numbers dying from tobacco related illnesses or drugs derived from the opium poppy alone each year are staggering.

“That’s why when ever people ask me what is the most dangerous thing in the yard, I always say it’s the gardener,” Robertson says. “Plants aren’t wicked. We are the ones who take these poisonous plants and turn them into harmful ones.”