



ACTOR FRANK KELLY is probably best known for playing Father Jack Hackett in the multi-award-winning Channel 4 TV series, *Father Ted*. His career spans radio, TV, theatre and film. He has written widely for TV and radio and has recorded many radio plays. He had his own weekly radio comedy show for seven years and a hit single, 'Comedy Countdown'. He has appeared in many films, including *Ryan's Daughter*, *The Italian Job*, *The War of the Buttons* and *Evelyn*. TV appearances include *Glenroe*, *The Year of the French*, *Memoirs of an Irish RM* and *Remington Steele*. He played the role of Frosch in Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* in the 2006 Glyndebourne Opera Festival and recently completed filming a four-part TV series for TG4.

Frank Kelly

“My favourite is the orange blossom. The big orange blossom bush down at the bottom of the garden comes out in the late spring, which I love to see. It's very heartening, it's a harbinger of spring and growth and life. It's kind of a barometer that the garden is coming into life.

My garden is mainly shrubs and trees. Because of the nature of my work, I can't tend bedding plants. I can cut back and prune and things like that, but I can't keep watching plants.

We have a long-haired golden retriever called Heidi, and when she was younger, you couldn't put down a plant without her retrieving it! She'd retrieve them and place them at your feet — very kind. So we resorted to bags of busy lizzies, which now bloom so late into the year, it just isn't true. It's just amazing the climatic change, everything seems to be blooming longer now. There's growth right through the winter. We had to cut our grass in December. That's just unthinkable.

For years the garden was what I'd call a 'grass desert'. We had an enormous back lawn, quite featureless. So I decided to do something radical about it and my daughter, Jayne, quickly drew out a design on the back of an envelope, which I adopted on the spot!

There's now a big circle in the middle of the lawn, in the middle of which we have a huge willow tree, it's very beautiful. We have two paths cutting into that circle. I brought in six and a half tonnes of gravel, which I had to barrow in. I'll never forget that, I was on my knees bringing in the last of the stuff. I've never been so beaten by something in my life.

I used to grow a lot of vegetables — vegetables would be my thing if I ever went back to heavy gardening. I used to grow potatoes and cabbage — there's nothing like a potato from your own garden, the taste is unbelievable. A few summers ago, I used to grow a lot of tomatoes and stuff in my greenhouse. I haven't been able to do that since, because I've been away and you can't mind anything. You have to be available in a garden, this is my problem.

Years ago, I got packets of seeds, which had been — probably unlawfully — brought from America. They were sent to a

deceased uncle of my wife's and I planted them. They were varieties of peas and beans, but they were an enormous size, truly amazing, I couldn't believe the difference — I thought the peas were broad beans first, when I saw the pods. Obviously a bigger environment seems to mean bigger produce.

When the children were very small and playing on the road, the baker's cart would go down the road, from Johnston Mooney & O'Brien. The horse used to defecate on the road and, of course, I would be out like a shot with the bucket to collect it. The children were absolutely mortified. They would plead with me not to do it, horrified that I was out collecting horse's poo off the road! It's an absolutely wonderful fertilizer — if you got a bucket of it and put water with it, that's a lot. They were very ashamed of me — eccentric Dad... .

The thing I miss most of all is the sound of little voices in the garden — my children. When I was gardening when they were small, I would always hear their voices. And one day I was out gardening in the back garden on my own, and I heard children playing in a neighbouring garden, and I almost wept. I've seven children, they're all grown up now and married.

This year, I hope to reduce the number of cordyline trees, because they proliferate alarmingly. The problem is that you spend your life picking up the palm fronds and trying to find ways of getting rid of them. There's just an endless harvest of them. They don't biodegrade, they're really a grass, they're not a tree. I don't like them particularly because they're a damn nuisance. One thing you can do is cut them down to almost ground level and they'll crown at that level. So it's not so bad when they shed, because they don't shed far and wide. It's not that they're unattractive but they're a nuisance.

We have several willow trees around the garden apart from the big one. The big one is stunning. My wife's spirits lift when she sees the thin mist of green that begins to come on it in spring. It's a real sign of spring when it goes green, it's her kind of barometer of the seasons.”

— in conversation with Yvonne Gordon