

THE DETAILS

STYLE

Natural-looking garden on a gentle slope, planted with ornamental grasses, perennials and fruit trees

SEASONS OF INTEREST

All year round – autumn is a particular highlight

SIZE

A third of an acre (1,200 square metres)

SOIL

Sandy, permeable and dry

Mellow FRUITFULNESS

Reminiscent of an autumnal landscape in southern England, this German garden now puts on new clothes, with rich texture and deep hues

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRÉ REUTER

OPPOSITE Leaves on the distinctively tiered branches of the giant dogwood tree (*Cornus controversa*) light up in shades of pink THIS PAGE The view looking westwards reveals the blue and white gable of the Heine family home, built in the 1950s



TOP Privet hedging separates the upper and lower garden areas, while the lower path is flanked by heavily berried plum-leaved thorn trees. Grasses include *Calamagrostis brachytricha* with fluffy, plume-like flower sprays ABOVE Ulrich and Marion OPPOSITE The plum-leaved thorn trees bear clusters of deep-red berries

Late summer is sliding gently into autumn, and Marion Heine's favourite ornamental grasses are at their height, with the feathered flower heads of Chinese silver grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus') catching the sunlight as they flutter in the breeze. Above them, trees such as Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*) and plum-leaved hawthorn (*Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia') reveal their changing foliage in burnt tones of yellow, orange, red and purple, while the shady beds beneath are illuminated by clumps of hostas, their ribbed leaves turning to ochre-yellow, alongside blue-violet Michaelmas daisies.

Textural grasses interweave with flowering perennials to create a relaxed but structured scheme, rich in seasonal interest, and Marion and her husband Ulrich take particular pleasure in the garden's transitional mood. "There's a certain magic here in autumn," Marion says. "It is very soothing, as the grasses rustle in the wind. With the sun coming from the west in the afternoon and shining through all the plants on the slope, it's a wonderful picture to look at."

The area around the German town of Plön, where the couple live, is not unlike southern England, defined by hills, hedges, forests and historic estates, and benefiting from a relatively mild climate. It is in Schleswig-Holstein, a state

that lies on a narrow strip of land between the North and Baltic Seas, bordering Denmark to its north. There are many lakes in the area, and seabirds, including white-tailed sea eagles, can often be seen soaring overhead.

Marion's long, narrow, 72-by-17-metre rear garden rises upwards over a westerly slope. When they moved here in 1996, it reminded her of *Sleeping Beauty*, because the plot – originally planted with self-sufficiency in mind – was overgrown with fruit trees and bushes, shutting out the light from their new home. Marion tasked herself with clearing the land, leaving just a few fruit trees *in situ*, and, rather than terracing it, she chose to make two distinct levels, doing all the groundwork herself by hand with a spade and wheelbarrow as the access was too narrow for vehicles or machinery.

A lower garden was created first – distinguished by an island bed and a pathway flanked by trees – which then leads through a tantalising gap in a privet screen to the upper garden area. Here, a lawned walkway sweeps up the incline, past further beds planted with grasses and perennials. It is punctuated throughout by interesting trees and topiary balls of box and yew.

The planting scheme has been partly informed by the soil, which is sandy, dry and permeable, ruling out many flowering ▶

Marion's TOP 5 FOR AUTUMN

1 CHINESE SILVER GRASS (*MISCANTHUS SINENSIS* 'MALEPARTUS') Ornamental grass with tall flower spikes, whose narrow green leaves turn orange and yellow in autumn; H2m.

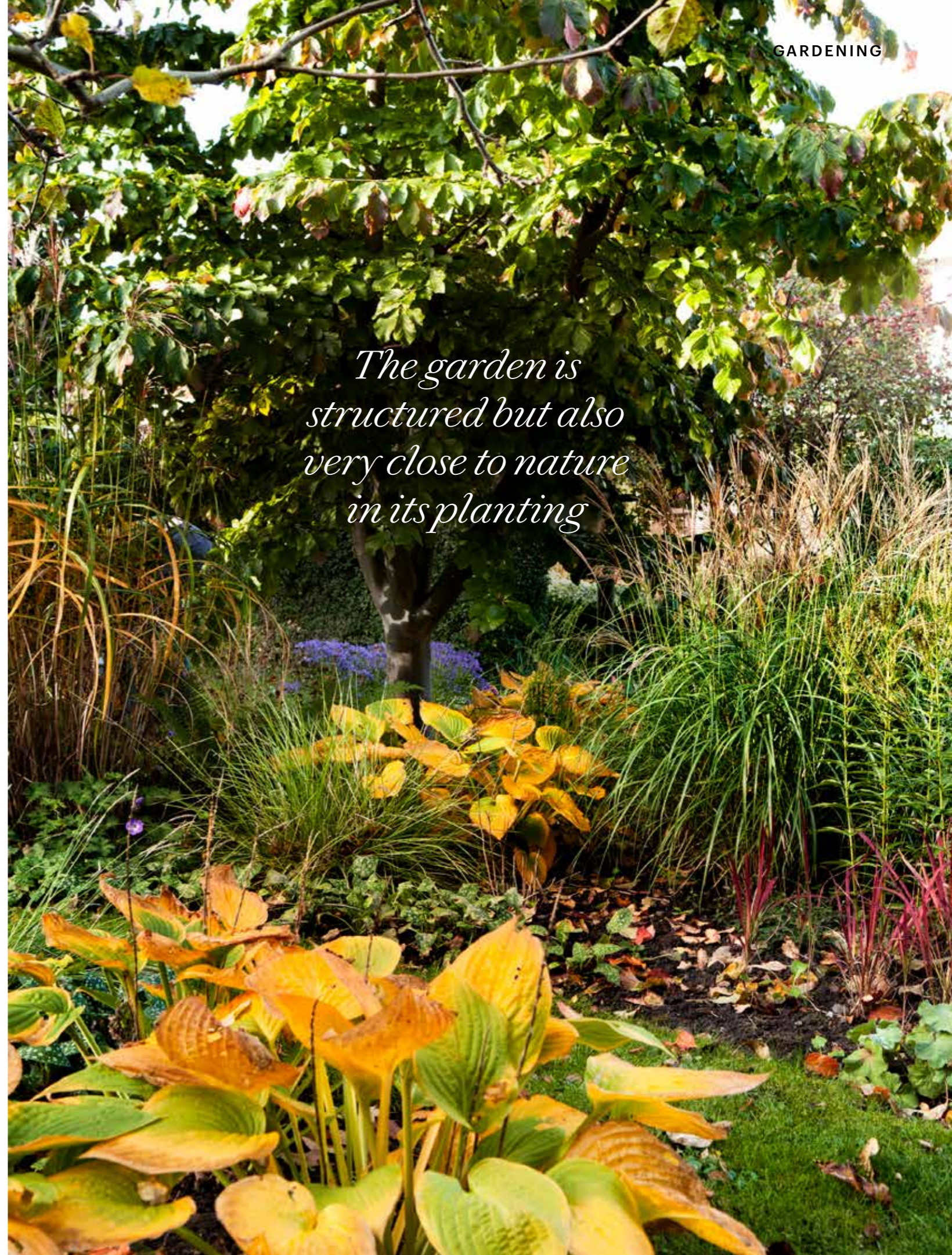
2 AUTUMN MOOR-GRASS (*SESLERIA AUTUMNALIS*) Evergreen grass with bright green linear leaves that grows spray-like flower heads once summer is over; H1m.

3 PERSIAN IRONWOOD (*PARROTTIA PERSICA*) Striking tree providing vivid seasonal colour when its leaves turn yellow, red and purple in October and November; H8m.

4 PLUM-LEAVED HAWTHORN (*CRATAEGUS PERSIMILIS* 'PRUNIFOLIA') Undemanding small tree that has attractive, deep-red berries at this time of year; tolerant of sandy soil and hot weather; H8m.

5 SNOWY MESPIUS (*AMELANCHIER OVALIS*) Deciduous shrub bearing edible fruit and burnt-orange foliage in autumn; H4m.





The garden is structured but also very close to nature in its planting

ABOVE, FROM LEFT The bench under the apple tree is a favourite retreat for the Heines; purple-flowering monkshood 'Arendsii' BELOW 'Holstein' apple OPPOSITE The yellowing leaves of *Hosta sieboldiana* lend luminous colour to this corner of the garden, which is framed by a Persian ironwood tree and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Adagio' grasses



perennials. After adding compost and soil improver, Marion introduced species that thrive in dry conditions, such as ornamental grasses.

A guiding light, design-wise, was the late British landscape designer John Brookes. His architectural approach clearly struck a chord with Marion, who studied architecture at university and then specialised in construction using glass and steel. "You develop a feel for form and structure, and that stays with you," she says.

One change she has made to the initial plan is the edging of the pathway in the lower garden. Initially, she put in roses and gooseberry bushes, but felt they stood too low to create a pleasing line, so she replaced them with four plum-leaved hawthorn trees (*Crataegus persimilis* 'Prunifolia'). With their flame-coloured foliage and red berries in autumn, these are now a defining feature.

Another factor Marion had to take into account was the line of tall trees along the rear boundary, a remnant of a former park. For the areas they overshadow, Marion has found that epimediums and early-flowering borage (*Trachystemon orientalis*) work well – and help to suppress weeds. Aconites and asters, especially the white wood aster (*Aster divaricatus*), tolerate the shade here, too, helping to brighten dark corners.

In the early years, the garden was Marion's domain, requiring daily input, but now that it

is more established, she shares the workload with Ulrich, who is a mechanical engineer. He keeps things in check whenever Marion's work as a tour guide and author takes her away from home. They both have a relaxed approach. "The garden is structured but also very close to nature in its planting – it's not manicured," she says.

A recent project has been the re-shaping of the front garden, which boasts views of one of Plön's lakes, and was previously given over to lawns. Marion has replaced them with a mix of ornamental grasses and perennials, and she looks forward to watching these mature.

For 15 years now, the Heines have opened their garden to the public through the German equivalent of the National Garden Scheme, Offener Garten, and between 300 and 400 people visit annually. "People often say: 'This must involve so much work,'" says Marion. "My attitude is, yes, I do invest a lot of energy in it, but it gives me a great deal back."

Seated on their favourite bench on an autumn afternoon, she and Ulrich delight in looking out over the fruits of their labours. "In a garden, you find nourishment of another kind, through its beauty," Marion says. "Gardening is something for the soul."

FOR MORE INFORMATION about Garten Heine and the dates it is open to the public, visit heine-gartenprojekte.de or offenergarten.de.