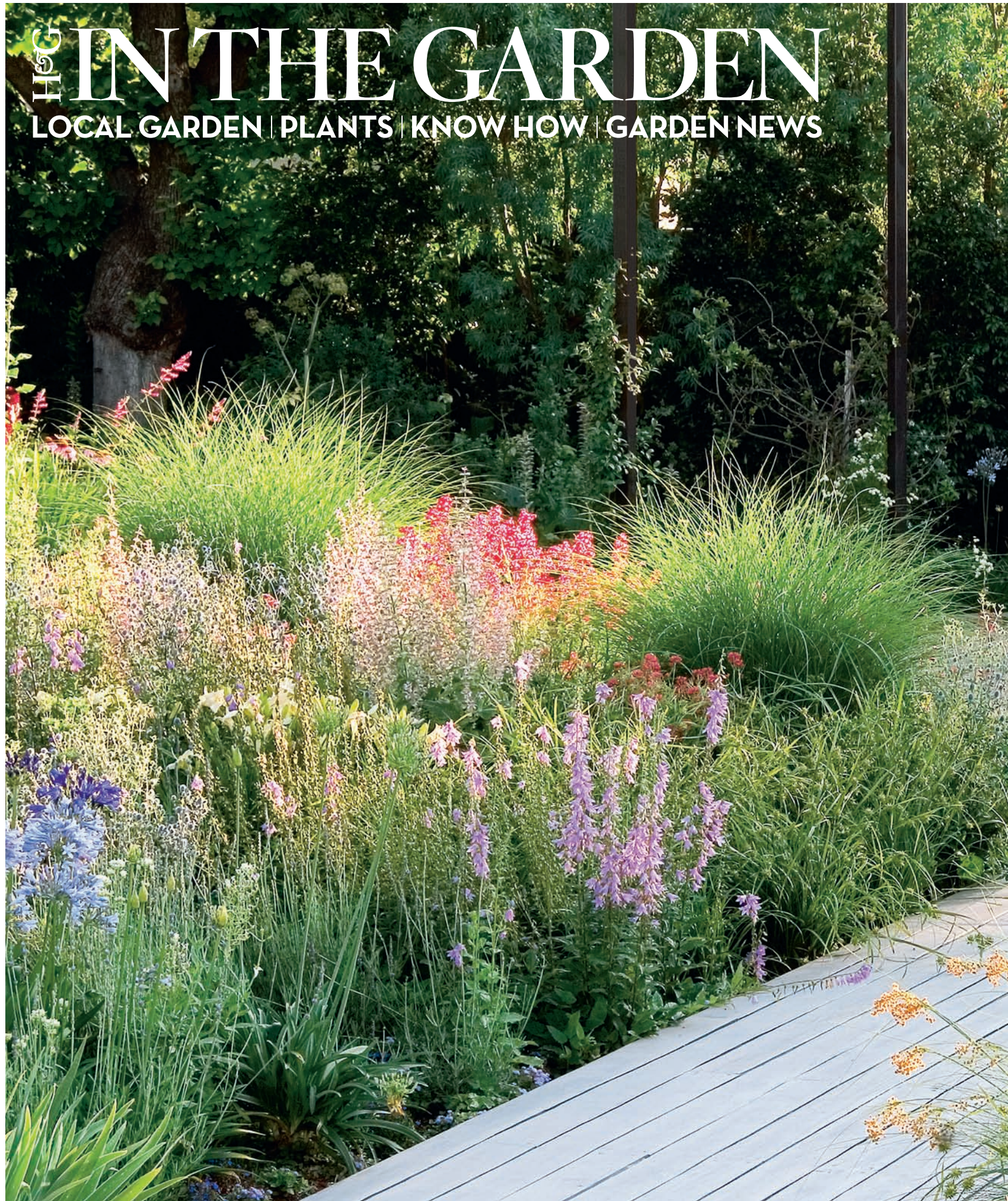


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IN THE GARDEN

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Wild AT HEART

Generous drifts of prairie-style planting form a tapestry of colour, shape and texture in this Johannesburg garden. Here, naturalistic combinations of elegant perennials and grasses are juxtaposed with strong structural hard landscaping for added impact

A PATH OF WOODEN DECKING DIVIDES A BED FILLED WITH SOFT SHADES OF PURPLE, BLUE AND A DASH OF PINK, WHILE ELEGANT GRASSES LEND HEIGHT AND FORM. THE GARDEN, CREATED BY A TALENTED TEAM, COMBINES A CLEVER MIX OF GRASSES AND PERENNIALS TO STUNNING EFFECT WHILE OFFERING A LONG SEASON OF INTEREST

TEXT DIANA BARRELL PHOTOGRAPHS CHRISTOPH HOFFMAN

LOCAL GARDEN

WHEN A VENERABLE old oak was felled by a storm a few years ago, the shady azalea-filled garden of Alessandra and David Newton became exposed and changes were needed. The dynamic duo of Debby Tenquist and Martine de la Harpe of Flower Power Gardens was invited to come up with a solution and the space was transformed into a sunny prairie-style garden. There were two immediate challenges to be faced; uneven garden levels and a previously hidden house across the road that was now glaringly obvious. Architect Rowley Watermeyer collaborated with the team for a more formal layout – a sunken garden bisected by a path of wooden decking and encompassed by retaining walls separating the rest of the garden from the new beds. A tall semi-circular steel pergola planted with various climbers was designed to screen off the neighbours while an ornamental pond provided a focal point from the house.

Tenquist adores the ground-breaking work of revered Dutch landscaper Piet Oudolf, known for his naturalistic plantings and his premise that plants should 'live and die well'. Plants in a prairie garden need to earn their keep, they must be robust, self-supporting and have something to offer over the seasons. Grasses are a staple, including *Miscanthus sinensis*, a large feathery plumed grass, the reddish *Pennisetum* 'Rubrum' that flowers prettily in autumn and the winter oat grass *Chasmanthium latifolium*. De la Harpe wanted to source indigenous grasses and they have used varieties of *Scirpus* and the broad-leaved thistle grass very successfully.

The result is spectacular, both in summer and in winter when ornamental seed heads and the bleached stems of dried grasses provide structure and texture until the end of August. Vigorous perennials in a white/blue/pink palette, such as *Sedum*, *Agapanthus*, *Iris* and *Echinacea*, were chosen and offset by the creamy yellow of daylily, *Hemerocallis* 'Joan Senior' and *Sisyrinchium striatum* with shots of lime and burgundy to liven things up.

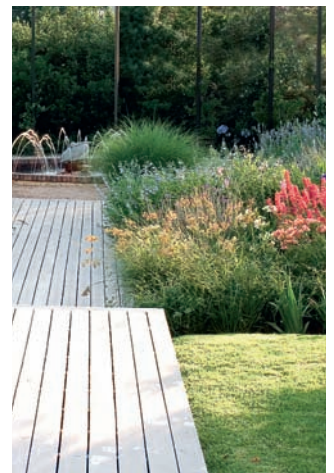
Bold brush strokes of colour are woven together in broad swathes, not in ascending order as in a conventional border, but in a mixed group anchored by some evergreens, such as *Spiraea* 'Arguta', *Teucrium* and the wallflower *Erysimum* 'Bowles Mauve', which composes itself conveniently into ball shapes. The *Salvia* family is well represented by *Salvia uliginosa*, the pale celadon-leaved 'Turkestanica', the two-metre 'Purple Majesty' and a giant pink *salvia* used to blur and soften the retaining walls. The duo has a veritable passion for plants, especially



the rare and unusual and they plan to open a nursery next year – welcome news for plant hunters.

The wonder of this type of garden lies in its low maintenance and long season. Most work takes place at the end of winter when grasses are cut back, over-vigorous plants lifted and divided and initially some weeding is needed. Many plants, like campanula, hollyhock and valerian, self-sow and are happily left to flourish making a slightly different composition each year. Composting and mulching follows, even better using the cut grasses for a truly self-sustaining garden.

I visit the garden on a chilly Highveld winter's day, the silver fronds of the grasses ephemeral in the late afternoon sun, the colours are ▶





Plants in a prairie garden need to earn their keep, they must be robust and self-supporting



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP THE SPIRES OF HOLLYHOCKS AND MISCANTHUS PROVIDE HEIGHT, WHILE THE SOFT-WHITE GAURA SERVES AS A FILLER BETWEEN THE MORE STRUCTURAL CLUMPS; THE LEMON Y TONES OF THE DAY LILY 'JOAN SENIOR' PUNCTUATE THE BORDER; DEEP-BLUE AGAPANTHUS 'BLUE VELVET' **OPPOSITE PAGE** **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** THE STRIKING PINK OF PENSTEMON 'GARNET' MIXES WITH THE

GENTLER BLUES AND PURPLES OF THE SALVIAS; A LUSH SELECTION OF GRASSES AND PERENNIALS COMPLEMENTS THE HOUSE'S ARCHITECTURE; CRIMSON HOLLYHOCKS ADD BOLD COLOUR TO THE PALETTE; HARD LANDSCAPING IS JUXTAPOSED WITH SOFT PLANTING; THE SEED HEADS OF VARIOUS GRASSES, SUCH AS CAREX GREGGII 'STARSEEDS', PROVIDE AUTUMN AND WINTER INTEREST



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subdued but the shape and texture of the garden is magical, like a changing canvas. 'I love the challenge of imagining a natural living tapestry and then selecting and placing the plants to realise the vision,' says De la Harpe. Truly it is a vision, they have created a garden of deceptive simplicity and painterly splendour, each season offering its own charm and a promise of things to come. ■ *Flower Power Gardens* www.flowerpowergardens.co.za

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT THE GIANT *SALVIA INVOLUCRATA* X *KARWINSKI* HAS POPPING-PINK FLOWERS; ALSO KNOWN AS SPIDER FLOWERS, CLEOMES ADD DRAMATIC HEIGHT AND SHAPE TO THE FLOWER BORDERS; SOFT-PINK CONE

FLOWERS (*ECHINACEA PURPUREA*) FORM A KEY CORNERSTONE IN THIS TYPE OF PLANTING AND ARE IDEAL FOR ATTRACTING WILDLIFE TO A GARDEN; SOFT BLUE SPIKY SEA HOLLY (*ERYNGIUM*) HAS THIN WIRY STEMS AND SPINY LEAVES

TRADE SECRETS

Debby Tenquist from Flower Power Gardens gives pointers for prairie-style planting:

THE RIGHT ENSEMBLE

Try to interweave broad swathes of single colours to form sinuous ribbons of different plants varying in texture and form; punctuate with large form grasses. This will help create an overall harmonious combination. Stick to a restricted palette of three or four colours.

STRUCTURE AND SEASONAL INTEREST

Grasses with ornamental plumes/seed heads.

MISCANTHUS SINENSIS 'GRACILLIMUS', a large form plant with plumes in autumn and winter.

PENNISETUM 'RUBRA' has rusty-coloured leaves and plumes in autumn. **SETARIA MEGAPHYLLA**, a tall, vigorous indigenous grass that will grow in sun or shade. **CHASMANTHIUM LATIFOLIUM**, known as oat grass, is a staple for prairie planting. It produces showy seed heads in late summer and autumn that remain through winter.

CAREX GREGGII 'STAR SEEDS' is ornamental in winter with fresh green hues in spring. **SCIRPUS 'GREEN MIST'** is an indigenous evergreen grass.

ORNAMENTAL CHARM

Perennials with long-lasting flower heads.

ERYNGIUM AND ECHINOPS are structural plants with thistle-like flowers that are ornamental in winter; inter-plant to disguise their legginess.

AGAPANTHUS 'BLUE VELVET' stands out strongly against the more subtle blues. **ECHINACEA**, with their pink and white ballerina skirts and ornamental seed heads in winter, are a must for this type of planting. **JAPANESE ANEMONE**, both pink and white.

FILLING THE GAPS

Soft fillers between more structural plants.

ASSORTED GIANT SALVIAS, such as black and blue varieties, *S. 'Blue Angel'*, bog sage (*Salvia uliginosa*), the giant deep purple *Salvia 'Purple Majesty'* that can grow up to two metres high, *S. turkestanica* and the striking giant pink *S. involucrata* x *karwinski*, a form plant with a weeping habit of growth that flowers from mid-summer to late autumn in both sun and shade.

SELF-SEEDING ANNUALS AND PERENNIALS

Cleomes create instant colour and height, while white- and pink-flowering *Centranthus* add interest. Hollyhocks and tall blue *Ageratum* are ideal for form and height. *Campanula latifolia* create vigorous splashes of colour.

FORM PLANTS

For evergreen structure, use daylilies, Peruvian lilies, irises, *Teucrium*, *Spiraea arguta*, lavender, *Penstemon*, *Erysimum 'Bowles Mauve'* and *Pride of Madeira (Echium)*.