



# Blue-sky THINKING

Creative ideas turned this underachieving garden into a verdant haven for people and wildlife alike

Words **Judy Diamond** Photographs **Carolyn Grohmann**

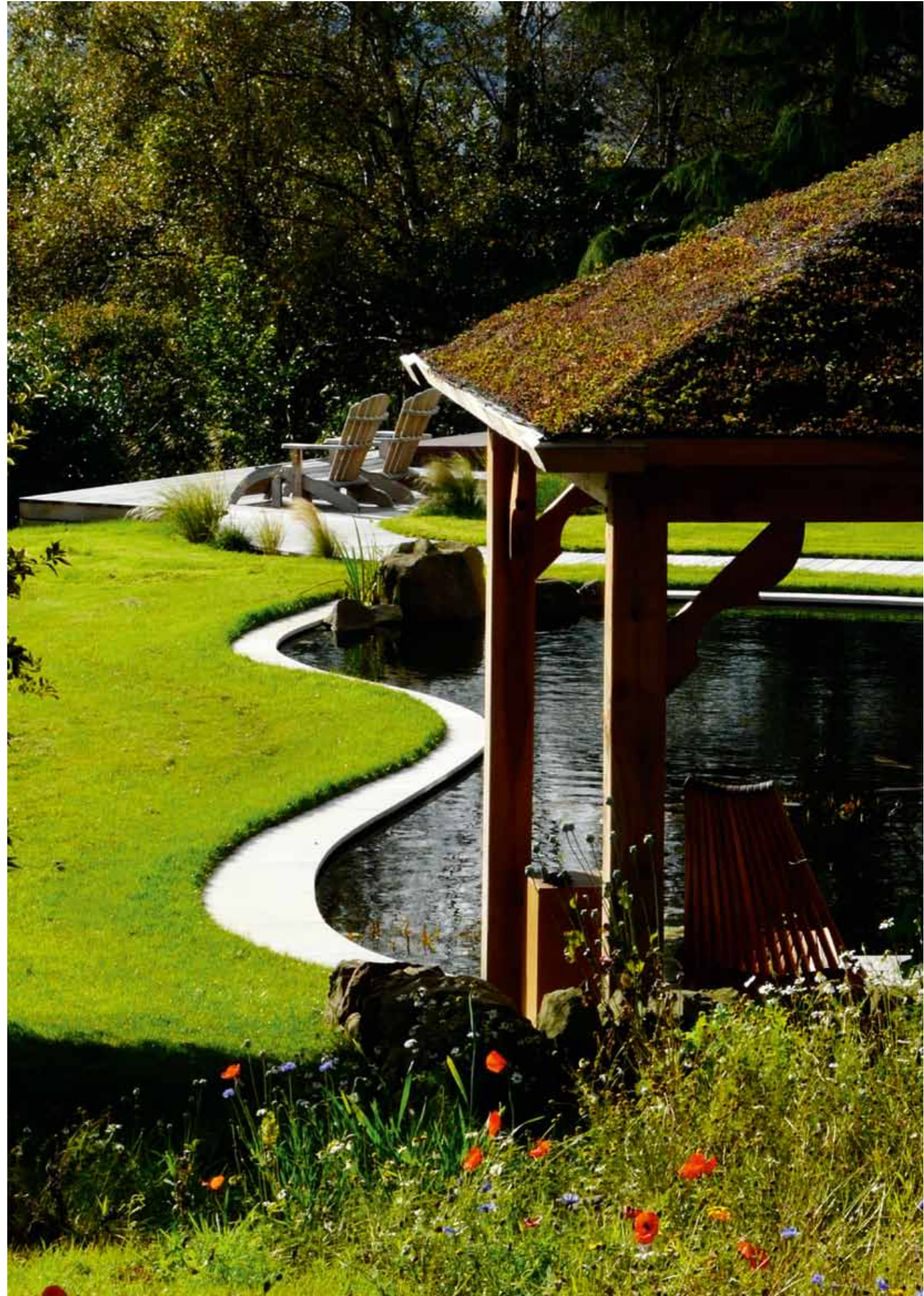
**To a lot of people**, gardens are wonderful – in theory. In practice, with mowing, weeding and maintenance to consider, to say nothing of working out how to make the place inviting beyond the fleeting Scottish summer, it's another matter altogether.

That was the case with this garden in Fife. A full acre in size, south-facing and with fabulous views of the Forth, it should have been where the owners spent most of their time. It had an orchard, a pond and a hot tub, but once they'd built a sun terrace, they didn't know what to do next. It was a garden with great potential – how could they get more out of it?

Calling in Carolyn Grohmann of Secret Gardens proved an inspired move. She asked the family to put together a wish list for their ideal garden, along with any practical requirements. "It doesn't matter if they can't see how it will all fit together – that's my problem," says the garden designer. "As we talked through their wishes, it became clear ▶



[Above] The teak Adirondack chairs (£245 each, from Cyan Furniture) are ideal for sipping an aperitif. [Above right] Long grasses soften the path leading to the arbour, where two Italian Cruise chairs (£302 each, from Southsea Deckchairs) wait. [Opposite] The sedum roof, the pond's curving sandstone edge and the plentiful wildflowers give a relaxed feel to the garden. Among the plants are *Knautia macedonica* and *Astrantia major*







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that they wanted to be tempted by a bit of blue-sky thinking. If I could come up with something with a contemporary edge that was sympathetic to its surroundings, they would go for it."

It took a few weeks for Carolyn to pin down exactly how the new garden would work. "They loved their little wildlife pond so a better positioned reflecting pool could definitely go into the design," she says. "A sheltered place to sit and take in the amazing views was essential. The hot tub had to stay where it was as it was in a great position for stargazing. And planting was desperately needed to soften the paving around the house."

The layout hinged on the new pool – it couldn't dominate the space or cut off access. The resulting figure of eight, edged with a



ribbon of cut sandstone, is an elegant solution. It was built and planted with waterlilies and reeds by Water Gems.

For shelter, a timber arbour was built (also by Water Gems, using local larch). It has a sedum roof and a split-level deck that feels like a jetty over the water's edge – the perfect place to sit and soak up the sun, particularly from the right seat: on one of these Italian Cruise chairs, for example, which give the arbour a contemporary edge. They're complemented by two "unbelievably comfortable" Adirondack Bear chairs: "They don't need cushions and they have a handy paddle on each arm for your G&T."

Clever thinking is evident throughout the garden: a timber walkway leads from the house to the hot tub's deck – a 'clean' route. "It means bathers can take a dip without carrying grass cuttings into the water on their feet," Carolyn explains.

She is at pains to point out that the planting is as important to the design as the structural features: "It should never be an after-thought." To that end, she worked closely with the award-winning Billy Caruthers of Binny Plants. The

orchard, which rises up behind the arbour, was thinned and then seeded with wildflowers. "Annuals such as poppy and cornflower create excellent colour over a long season and soften the background to this garden. The wildflower meadow also bridges the textural gap between the mown lawn and the woodland garden behind."

Planting between the house terrace and the rest of the garden was a crucial part of the design. "I wanted to create a haze of grasses and flowers over as long a season as possible. Around the hot tub I planted grasses which will create a veil of seclusion." And it's not just the owners who are delighted with the result: the garden buzzes with bees and insects all summer long – a key consideration for this wildlife-loving family.

"As with many clients, they were nervous about ending up with a high-maintenance garden," laughs Carolyn. "But I could see that if the garden inspired them sufficiently, maintenance would be less of a burden and more of a pleasure."

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[Top] The view of the Forth is a highlight of the garden – the family now have plenty of places to sit and enjoy it. [Right] The orchard sits behind the arbour. [Far right] The solidly constructed larch roof