



■ A drystone seating circle is a feature in a Secret Gardens-design garden in Braco

# let's all GO WILD

**AN ECO-FRIENDLY GARDEN, FULL OF COLOUR AND WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY PLANTS, WILL PROVIDE A HAVEN OF SOLACE, SAYS CAROLINE GROHMANN**

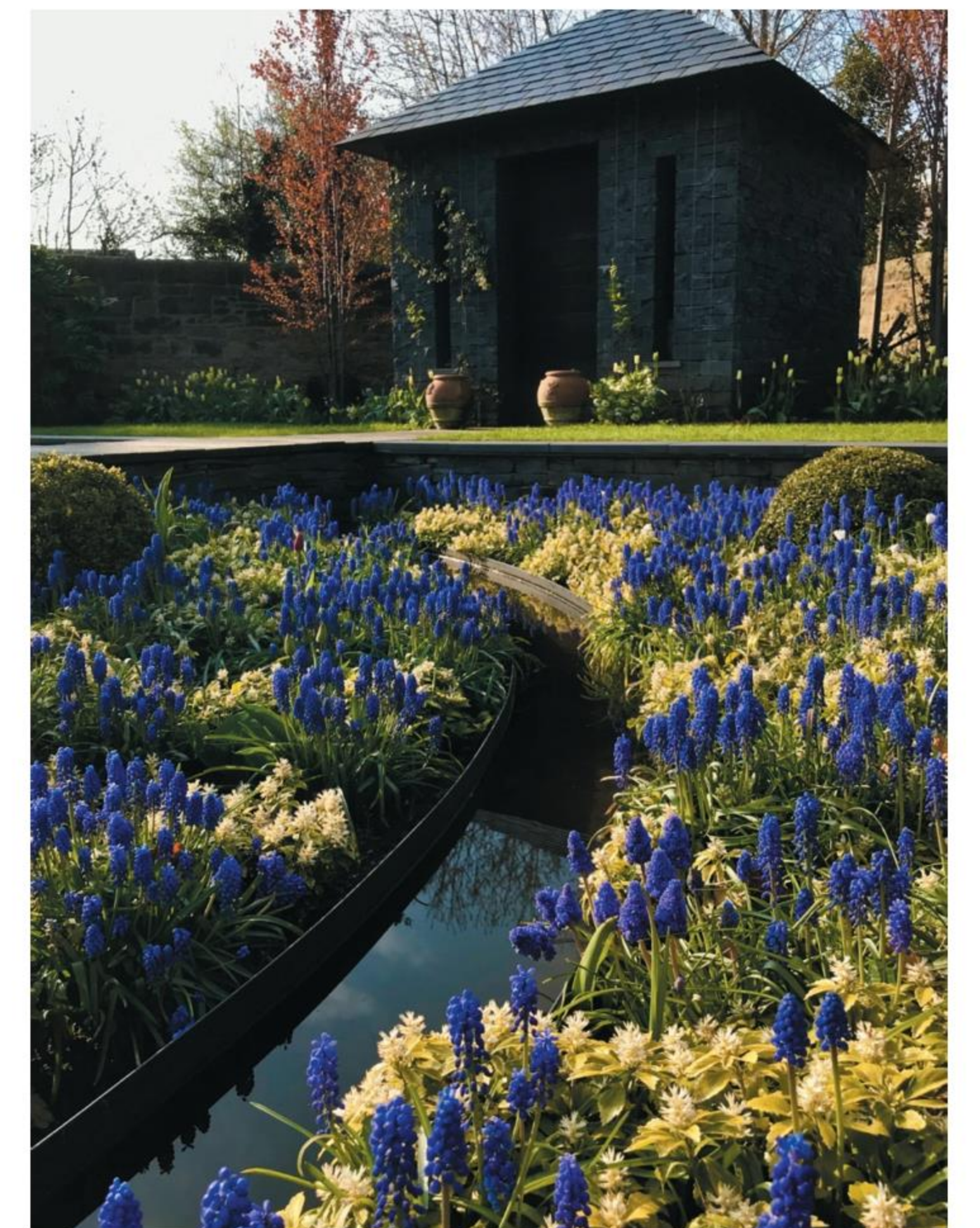
■ BY CARMEN HAIGH

**F**OR many of us Scots, gardens and green spaces have played a pivotal role in supporting our mental health while being largely cooped up for the past year or so, helping us to ground ourselves and reconnect with our natural environment. In an era of unknowns and unrest, we are able to at least take solace in the reliable, cyclical nature of the changing seasons and the unwavering beauty of the plant life around us.

Our gardens have taken on new meaning, becoming sacred spaces which offer an escape from the tedium of our home offices, or in which we can spend cherished time with loved ones. It's no wonder, then, that interest in gardening is at what seems to be a staggering all-time high, with many taking up the hobby within the last year, or employing the keen eye of a professional to help transform their personal plots into havens for socialising and unwinding.

"Lockdown has changed things," confirms Carolyn Grohmann at Secret Gardens in Edinburgh, whose services have been in high demand throughout the lockdowns. "I have definitely noticed an increased trend for outdoor living since the start of the pandemic, whether that is garden offices, firepits, outdoor kitchens or pizza ovens. I think people are being a bit tougher about spending time outdoors and their short-term perspective on their gardens has changed.

"I think it also marks a long-term change for people who are going to be working from home for the foreseeable."



Grohmann, who typically works alongside a team of landscaping specialists, is an award-winning garden designer whose flexible and open-minded approach has brought to life a number of diverse gardens over the last 20 years – from her parents' tranquil garden in the sunny Dordogne, to prolific novelist Kate Atkinson's suburban garden in Edinburgh (complete with a "writing den", of course), and a moorland garden in Perthshire which blends effortlessly with its rural surroundings.

Grohmann's love of garden design stems from her upbringing in Inveresk, a rural village famed for its beautiful gardens, including that of the National



Trust's Inveresk Lodge. While her parents were keen gardeners, Grohmann didn't feel too enthused about helping them growing up.

"I remember growing some flowers from seed in a little border in the garden, but I didn't get overly excited about that," Grohmann recalls. "I had no interest in looking after my parents' garden, but what I did absorb as a child was the atmosphere of gardens. There was a fête in the village each year and it would be held in one of the amazing local gardens. I remember the feeling that I got from being in those gardens – it was calming."

## 'One of the things I like to do is improve the biodiversity within a garden'

"I enjoyed the romantic style that a lot of them had and the sense of history that comes with gardens of older houses."

Reflecting on her career, Grohmann describes her design approach as having less of a "signature style" and instead being more focused on variety. That being said, there are some reoccurring themes and motifs running throughout her work, including the use of an abundance of pollinating herbaceous plants, as well as water bowls and circular features. "I love circles. We build in a lot of Edinburgh gardens, which are never square or geometrically perfect. A circular patio can fit into those spaces really well and provide a bold design focus, helping to cover up the fact that it's a bit of a skewed square or triangle," she explains.

But perhaps the most inspiring aspect of Grohmann's approach is her passion for creating sustainable, eco-friendly gardens which prioritise the local wildlife.

"One of the things I like to do is improve the biodiversity within a garden, and one of the quickest ways of improving the habitat for wildlife is to put pollinating herbaceous plants into the garden," she advises, citing Geranium Rozanne and Geum Totally Tangerine as two of her favourites, due to them being very long flowering. "Those two will flower in Scotland from June all the way through to the first

■ A wildlife pond in Braco is among the projects designed and built by Carolyn Grohmann's Secret Gardens



Carolyn Grohmann frost in November. They give you that steady colour and interest, and also provide food for insects – which is two big boxes ticked," she says.

"Mix lots of textures and create layers: pollinating ground cover plants, flowering shrubs which provide nesting opportunities, and then trees for birds and squirrels."

In several of her latest projects, Grohmann describes how she opted for "species-rich" turf in place of a standard green lawn. "The way I

■ Carolyn Grohmann of Secret Gardens



■ A colourful garden is always a joy to behold and an arbour seat will make sitting in it even more of a pleasure – no matter the weather



describe it to clients is that it's already got the weeds sown into it," she laughs. "It's already got daisies, clover, buttercups and dandelions in it, so you don't have to worry about them creeping in. It doesn't need to be cut as often, it doesn't dry out in hot weather and the bees get pollen when a lot of the herbaceous plants haven't even started yet – it's a win, win, win. I realised that we are battling against nature for no good reason at all."

Alongside wildlife-friendly planting, Grohmann likes to practise other sustainable approaches to garden design, including sourcing building materials locally, where possible, and stressing the importance of building to last. "Design and build your garden as well as you can, so that the next person that owns your house doesn't feel that they have to rip it all out and start again," she suggests.

"Spend wisely and invest in that little patch that is



■ Culross Community Garden in Fife, awash with colourful herbaceous plants

yours. You are investing in a bigger picture."

And her top tips for those who want to enhance their gardens themselves? "To make your garden a more sociable space, I'd say start with your furniture. Make sure it is as comfortable as possible and that it doesn't rely on cushions to look good or be comfy – in Scotland, we often have to take the cushions in because it rains a lot," she points out.

"For those with limited outdoor space, such as a small terrace or even just a set of steps, the best advice I can give is to plant as big a container as you can. If you go for small pots, they will dry out before the end of the day, whereas a bigger pot will retain moisture and you can grow a wider range of plants in it. There are lots of different planters on the market now, all kinds of materials that give you the interest of the planter itself as well as what's growing in it." ❧

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