

GARDENS

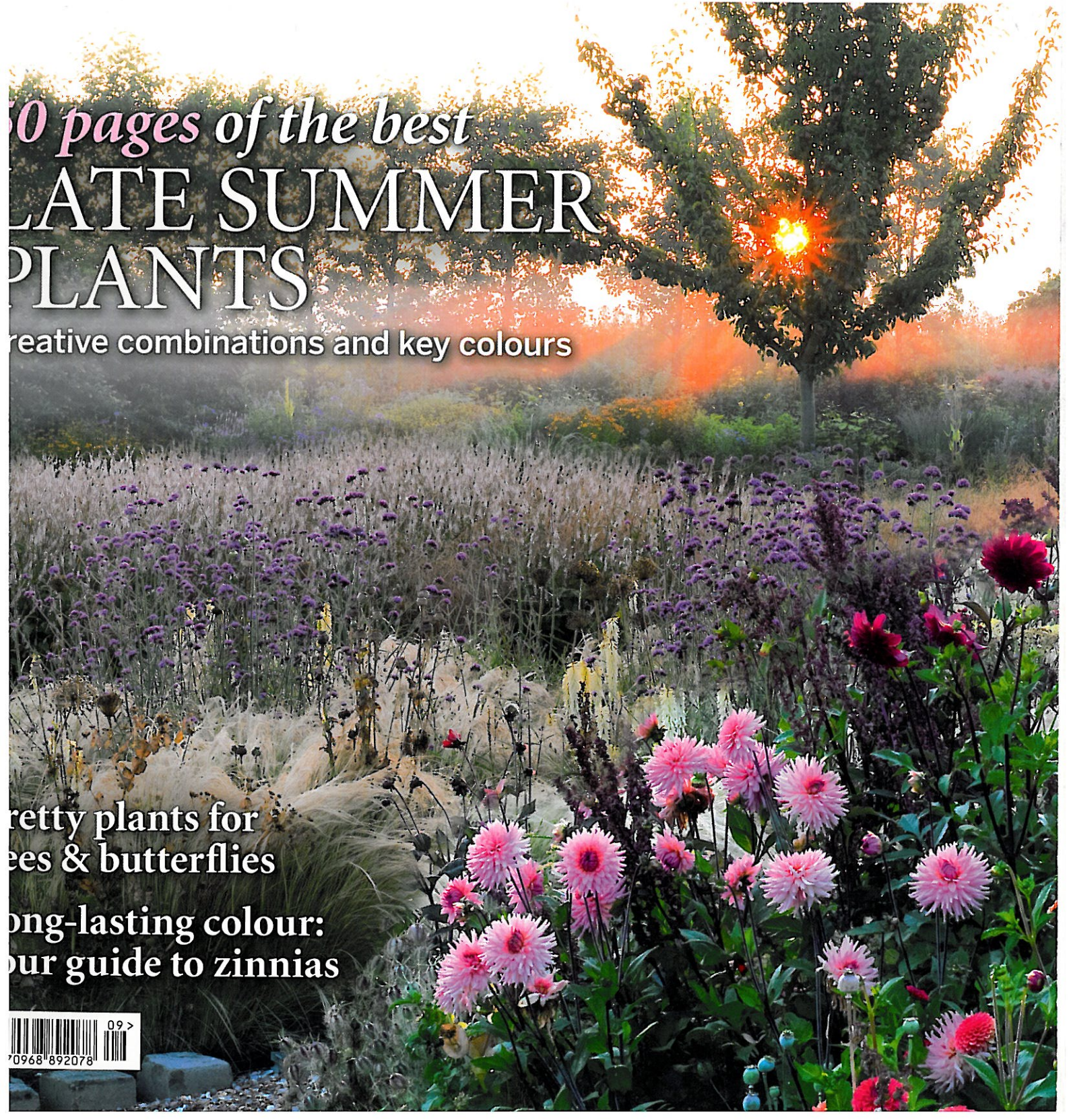
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**LATE SUMMER
PLANTS**

creative combinations and key colours

pretty plants for
bees & butterflies
long-lasting colour:
our guide to zinnias



In brief

NAME Het Vlackedland

WHAT Private garden belonging to garden designer Madelien van Hasselt

WHERE Zeeland, the Netherlands

SIZE 2.5 acres

SOIL Clay over sand

CONDITIONS Windy and dry

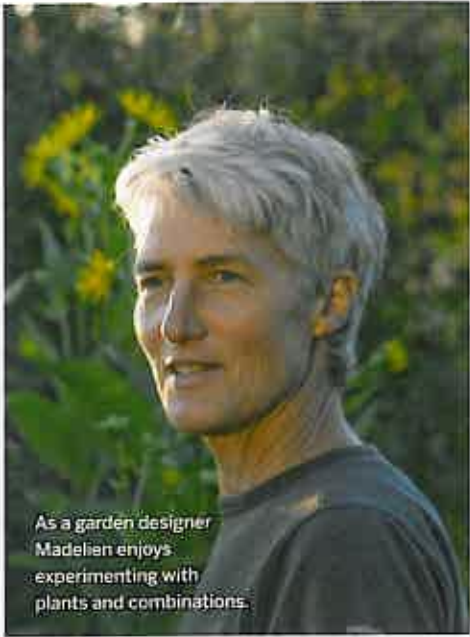
SPECIAL FEATURES Plant combinations utilising a wide range of plants especially perennials and grasses

Each border features a tree or shrub underplanted with a tapestry of grasses, perennials and annuals. Here the late summer sun shines through the pear 'Wilde Gieseman'. At the centre of a selection of dahlias is the tall ruby red 'Arabic Night'.

A Dutch tapestry

Skilfully woven using an inspired selection of plants, the garden of designer Madelien van Hasselt is bursting with colour and texture

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR PHOTOGRAPHS JURGEN BECKER



As a garden designer Madelien enjoys experimenting with plants and combinations.

Madelien van Hasselt is a tall, willowy, Dutch garden designer who, in my opinion, is pretty close to a plant genius. To stand in her garden is like standing at the gates of paradise.

Madelien and her partner Willy Oorthuijsen have been at Het Vlackeland for just eight years. "When we arrived it was a horse meadow with a bit of agricultural ground that had been used for sugar beet" she says. Eight years is a short time indeed to build a garden that looks this good but the secret is down to two things: the simplicity of the design and the ridiculously fertile soil.

The garden is based around a simple building which serves as an office. On the road side are a series of raised beds made from monumental chunks of timber recycled from their original life as mooring posts for trading ships in the harbour. One is destined to be a *Salvia* border. "I love salvias but in winter the ground sits too wet" for them so we need the extra depth of soil," explains Madelien. Another is newly replanted with *Cistus* after she lost the previous plants in last winter's heavy snow; a third floats with *Gaura lindheimeri*, daisies (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) and rusty foxgloves (*Digitalis ferruginea*).

Around the office she has wrapped a simple grid of rectangular beds which are divided by main paths made of scattered shells and secondary paths of wood chippings. "I have always liked the look of the 'mother' beds they have in nurseries where the plants are bulked up before division." This simpler linear pattern works perfectly because everything is manageable and every border accessible. As you walk along the paths it seems that you are marooned in the

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A framework for the bottleneck squash *Cucurbita maxima* to clamber up provides height to these borders, which include (front right) the spent flower heads of *Telakia speciosa* giving way to cerise *Cosmos bipinnatus*.



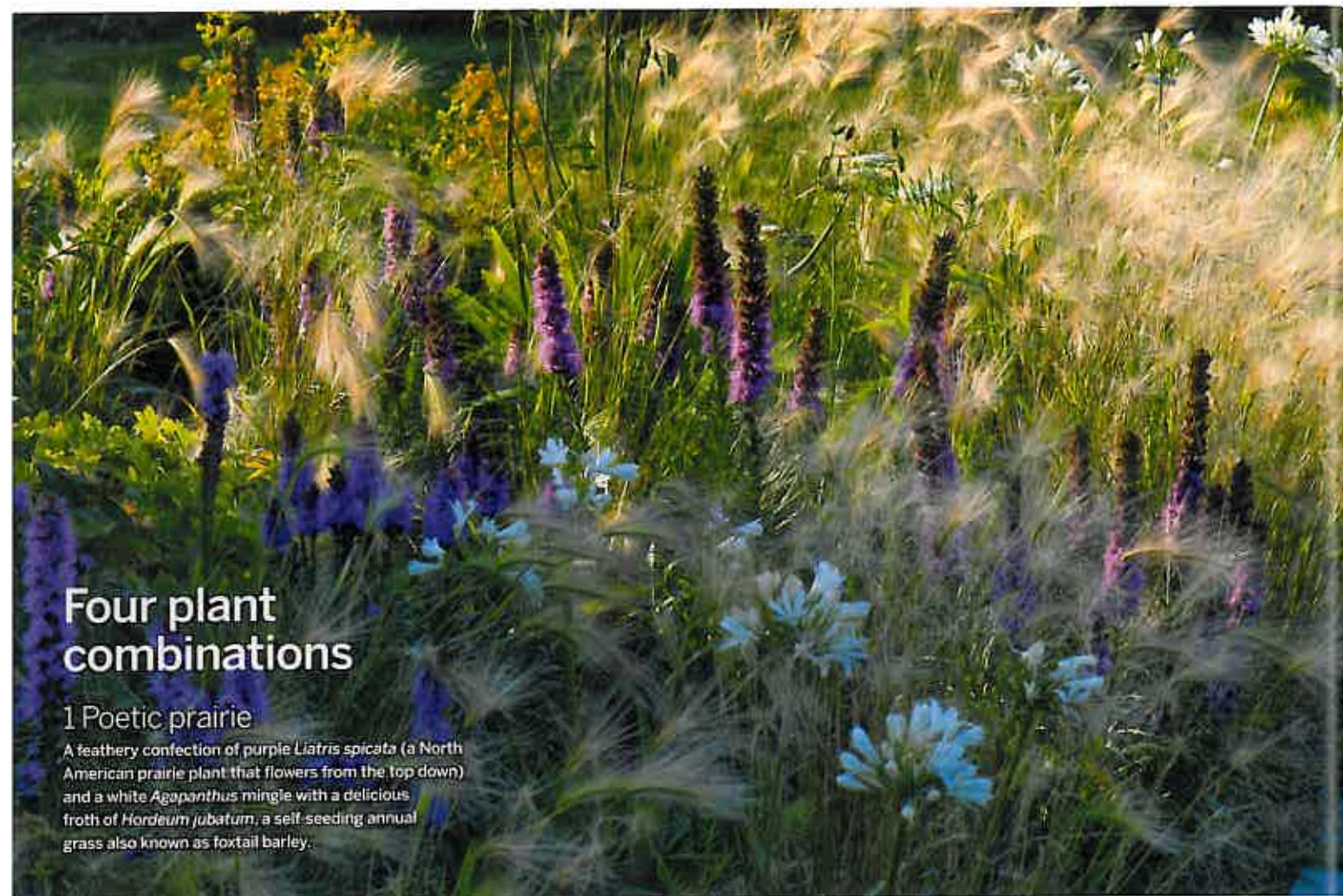
Paths of scattered shells divide rectangular beds filled with a tapestry of grasses and perennials, such as *Eryngium planum* in the foreground. A high alder hedge provides wind protection for fruit trees behind.



The planting near Willy's pond includes white spires of *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Album' (in the foreground on the left) while lofty cardoons and yellow *Inula magnifica* thrive on the far bank.



The low sun highlights drifts of tawny *Deschampsia cespitosa* and clumps of red *Crocusmia 'Lucifer'*. In the foreground on the right is *Nigella damascena*.



Four plant combinations

1 Poetic prairie

A feathery confection of purple *Liatris spicata* (a North American prairie plant that flowers from the top down) and a white *Agapanthus* mingle with a delicious froth of *Hordeum jubatum*, a self-seeding annual grass also known as foxtail barley.



Dutch garden

2 Contrast

Vibrant dahlias stand out against the dusky spent flower heads of dill *Anethum graveolens* and purple flower heads of *Verbena bonariensis*. The dahlias include various self-seeded hybrids, growing among *D. 'Honka'* (with an orange centre and slightly twisted white petals) and *D. 'Paso Doble'* (white with a yellow ruff in the centre).



3 Vibrant colour

Purple *Verbena bonariensis* blooms against the red-orange daylily *Hemerocallis 'Frans Hals'* and tall, lemony *Kniphofia 'Dorset Sentry'*. Fluffy flower heads of the grass *Pennisetum orientale 'Karley Rose'* add a contrast in texture.



4 A study in scarlet

Limey yellow umbellifer dill (*Anethum graveolens*) wanders romantically throughout the drier parts of the garden. Here it complements the reds of semi-double *Dahlia 'Bishop of Llandaff'* and darker, double-flowered *D. 'Arabian Night'*, intermingled with the plum seedhead of the fading annual *Atriplex hortensis*. In the back right corner is the crimson scabious *Knautia macedonica*.



The fluffy blond grass *Stipa tenuissima* (in the foreground) combines with the scabious *Knautia macedonica* in a dreamy, prairie-style planting.

“ Within this border are dips and slopes, valleys and peaks, rolling torrents and swirling cataracts of colour and life ”

▷ middle of one huge border. Het Vlackeland translates as ‘the Flat Land’ but within this border are dips and slopes, valleys and peaks, rolling torrents and swirling cataracts of colour and life. You don’t need hills with planting like this. It is muscular and energetic while at the same time extraordinarily delicate and sensitive.

Besides the design, the garden’s success owes much to the growing conditions. “There is about 60cm of nutritious clay over two metres of sand: this ground drains very well and, combined with the strong winds, helps us to grow robust plants,” says Madelien. Each rectangular border plays host to at least one specimen shrub or tree underplanted with a glorious tapestry of grasses, perennials and self-sown annuals. There are endless vignettes to enjoy, including a swathe of *Deschampsia cespitosa* ‘Goldtau’ studded with field poppies, *Nigella* and *Allium sphaerocephalon*. An area known as the Girlfriends’ Garden was created by Madelien along with two gardener friends (Ria and Ted) inspired by visits to the Garden Festival at Chaumont-sur-Loire. “It symbolises our journeys through life and is where we meet up: and when we do, we work in the garden,” Madelien says with a smile.

Further away from the office the mood changes slightly. There is a rectangular pond, Willy’s lake, that they dug out when they arrived, but around it the paths change from strict lines

to gentle meanders that lead the eye towards tantalising corners. The planting changes from scatterings to great linear waves of different plants – a jagged slice of *Echinacea purpurea* segues into heleniums and then into *Phlomis russeliana* and *Cephalaria gigantea*. On the other side of the path there is *Buddleja*, *Ligustrum* and mounds of *Rosa rugosa* and common ivy before a wind-breaking hedge. “One of my friends says that this path makes her feel so small, like Alice in ‘Wonderland,’” laughs Madelien.

This is a masterpiece of dramatic planting and, like all works of art, it seems effortless. It is not: Madelien works in it every spare hour she has and the lessons she learns benefit her clients. Willy helps when he can and they have three schoolboys aged between 13 and 17 who help on Saturdays. With their help Madelien van Hasselt has created something awesome: a garden that is practically perfect in every way. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

ADDRESS Het Vlackeland, Vlackeweg 5a, 4339 PE, Nieuw en St. Joosland, Zeeland, the Netherlands.

TEL +31 (0)118 606522.

WEBSITE www.vlackeland.nl

OPEN For groups of ten or more by appointment only, between mid-May and mid-October.

Late summer stars

Madelien van Hasselt chooses nine plants at their beautiful best in her late summer garden

1 *Hemerocallis* ‘Frans Hals’

I love not just this one, but all day lilies. Tough and hardy, this needs sunshine and grows 45cm tall.

2 *Agapanthus*

We have them in blue and white. Even now, after they have finished flowering, they look great. Good in pots as well. Grows to 70cm high.

3 *Kniphofia* ‘Green Jade’

One of my favourite pokers. The flowers fade to white. One of the shorter varieties, this grows to 75cm.

4 *Salvia uliginosa*

Bog sage needs some winter protection but is an invaluable flower for the late summer. Unlike many sages this can cope with a damper, shadier soil and grows to 1.2m.

5 *Helenium* ‘Loysder Wieck’

A very unusual variety. Not as orange as many but with a much perkier central boss. Late flowering, this grows to 1m high.

6 *Crocsmia* ‘Lucifer’

All crocsmias are fantastic. This provides hot late colour from July onwards, with the benefit of elegant sword-shaped leaves. 1.2m high.

7 *Cleome hassleriana*

An annual with strong colour: very useful for filling gaps. Excellent with dahlias and grasses. Sow seeds January to March under cover.

8 *Tigridia pavonia* ‘Speciosa’

A very sensual plant with its widespread red petals. I also have them in white. This plant needs excellent drainage.

9 *Acanthus spinosus*

Architectural leaves and strong flower spikes. Even before the flowers arrive, the spiny leaves add structure to a border. With tenacious roots, this grows to 1.5m high.

