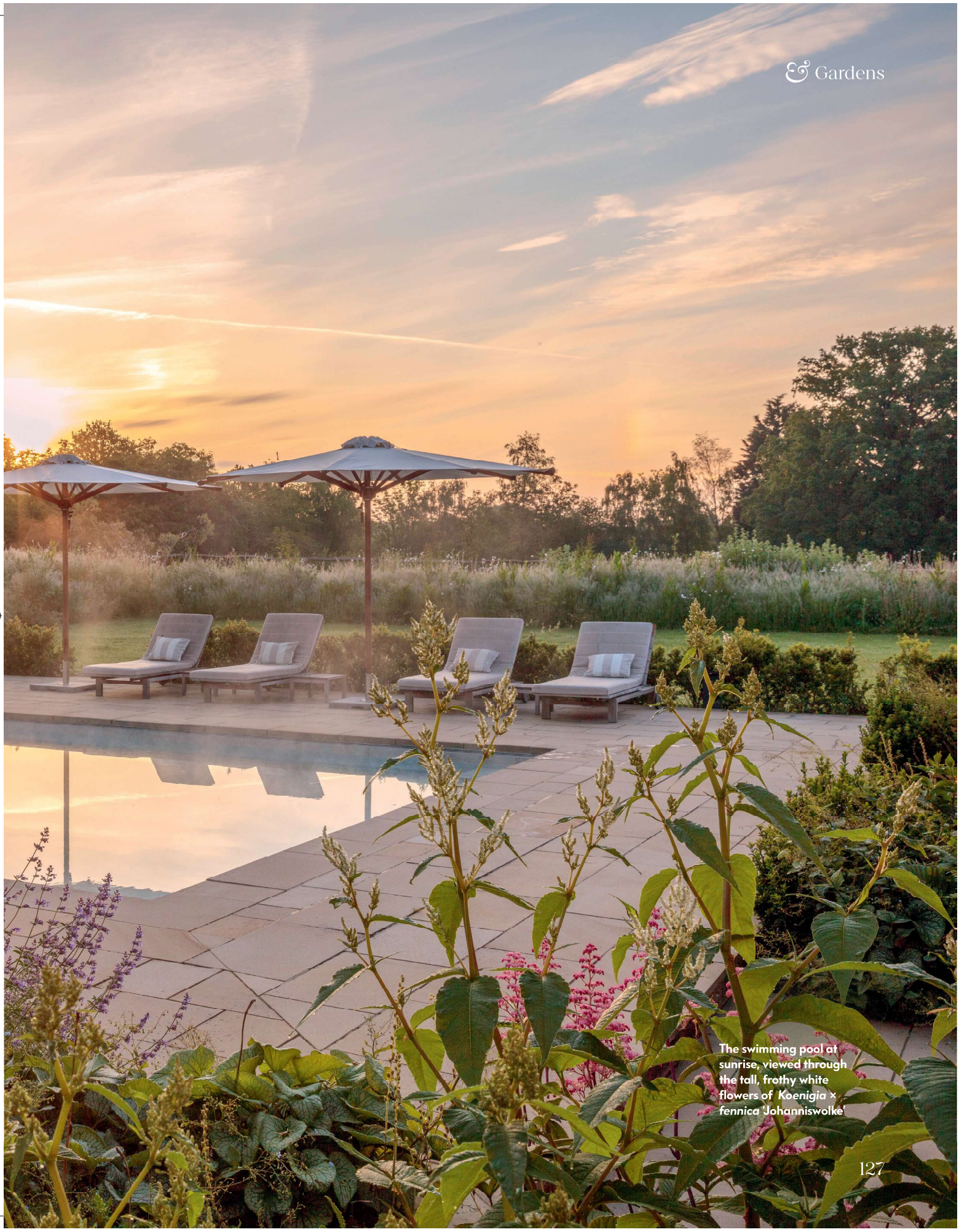


Life is GOOD

The garden of a former vicarage in Sussex now encompasses all the elements needed for relaxation and entertaining

WORDS ANNETTE WARREN **PHOTOGRAPHY** CLIVE NICHOLS

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 120 09/06/2025 10:35:33



The swimming pool at sunrise, viewed through the tall, frothy white flowers of *Koenigia* × *fennica* 'Johanniswolke'

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 121 09/06/2025 10:35:44



GARDEN GUIDE

Location West Sussex.
Orientation and size Faces east/west, 1.5 acres.
Soil type Heavy clay.
Special features A formal garden with lawns and generous borders that incorporates areas for relaxation and entertaining.
Garden designer Nic Howard of We Love Plants.

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 122 09/06/2025 10:35:51



The pool and terrace seen from the upper level of this family garden. In the foreground are the lavender blue flowers of *Geranium* 'Orion'

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 123 09/06/2025 10:36:01



Bursts of ornamental onion, *Allium* 'Purple Rain' on the garden's upper terrace



WHEN

landscape designer Nic Howard was brought in to create a lifestyle garden to complement a Victorian house surrounded by a scattering of outbuildings, he immediately grasped what the client required. 'It was pretty much a blank canvas,' he says. 'The family wanted privacy and a space in which to relax, swim, play sport and entertain. My job was to create a conjoined space that brought together the elements they desired, at the same time offering a relatively easy-to-maintain garden that would not require constant upkeep.'

Situated in a Sussex village, the former Victorian vicarage has been brought into the 21st century with sympathetic, soft planting that complements the modern extension and marries the various outbuildings. The front of the house is tempered with climbing roses and hydrangeas and to the side, raised brick planters containing low diagonal yew hedges beneath *Acer palmatum* trees lead to the main garden beyond. 'It was so open before and we wanted to screen the house from the parking area to create privacy,' says Nic.

Because the house sits on heavy clay, subsidence around the swimming pool had caused the paving to sink. This necessitated its complete removal and offered the ideal opportunity to reimagine the hard landscaping. The original garden was mostly laid to lawn, dotted with maple trees. 'The trees on the lawn didn't really bring anything to the layout,' says Nic, 'and since the owners wanted to screen the next-door property, we moved all the acers to the border, creating a curved woodland garden overlooking the lawn.'

Due to the sloping terrain, Nic divided the garden into different levels. Deep Corten steel panels and brick steps separate the main lawn from the lower level beside the house. Overlooking the home office, the woodland garden marks the boundary of the lawn and features an original mature flowering cherry. Beneath, Nic planted reliable perennials such as *Geranium* 'Rozanne', a hardy variety that flowers all summer long, spiny *Eryngium agavifolium* (sea holly) and soft ornamental grass *Sesleria autumnalis*, studded with lollipops of purple *Allium* 'Lavender Bubbles'. The acers that were moved from the lawn are underplanted with cornus which give colour in winter.

The sweep of lawn leads the eye to the back of the plot, where mature yews, laurels and rhododendrons are fronted with a 'skirt' of lime-green *Lonicera nitida* 'Maygreen'. 'It gives a lovely vibrant limey green effect beneath the darker trees which can look a bit sombre on their own,' says Nic. This green screen means that the view from the house is of plants, rather than the compost heap and shed which lie beyond the trees.

The lower level, a house-hugging combination of taupe herringbone bricks and gravel, is planted with low-clipped domes of hornbeam, pittosporum and hebe, flanked on one side by three amelanchier trees which create a divide between the natural part of the garden and the swimming pool terrace. Here, Nic has planted pollinators including *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', *Nepeta* × *faassenii* 'Purrsian Blue' PBR and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' amid the low-growing shrub *Teucrium fruticans* (tree germander) which bears tiny lilac coloured flowers. Curving around the pool, the border gradually blends into a wave of the ornamental grass *Stipa ichu*, which forms a natural break between the formal garden and the paddock beyond.

To soften the outbuildings and create a flow between the garden zones, Nic introduced a rectangular bed in shades of green, pink and purple with height provided by two mature apple trees. Low-clipped *Veronica rakaiensis* (hebe) is complemented by zingy green *Origanum vulgare* 'Aureum Crispum'. Pastel flowers include the pink flowering, bronze-leaved *Rodgersia pinnata* 'Chocolate Wing', purple *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low' and dainty *Rosa* 'Ballerina'.

All the elements of this tranquil garden have been tailored to the family's lifestyle, enhancing their leisure time whilst offering privacy and tranquillity, with planting that blends harmoniously with the surroundings.

"The goal was to create a relatively easy-to-maintain garden that would not require constant upkeep"

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 125 09/06/2025 10:36:15



HGN312.gardenstory.indd 126 09/06/2025 10:36:22



A herringbone brick path leads to the upper lawn, flanked by clipped domes of common hornbeam, *Carpinus betulus*

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 127 09/06/2025 10:36:30



The main terrace features a covered seating area and an outdoor kitchen for family entertainment

Ideal for ground cover, the delicate blue flowers of *Geranium* 'Orion' combine well with the airy leaves of the ornamental grass *Calamagrostis* x *acutiflora* 'Overdam'

DESIGNING A LIFESTYLE GARDEN

- Decide what you want to get out of your garden and consider different areas – dining, relaxing, swimming and so on.
- The hardscaping should marry the house and the planting without jarring. Consider materials – do you want gravel, slabs or pavers?
- Work out where the spaces will be in relation to the house. Positioning a dining area near to the house makes it easily accessible.
- Consider where the evening and morning sun will be, which will bear a relation to where you position your seating.
- Once you've decided on areas, think about how they are going to flow from one to the other. Using repeating plants will help marry the areas together.
- Research what plants suit your soil type and think about what you want from your plants – for example, do you want year-round interest? Low maintenance?
- If your garden is on a slope, you can turn it into different levels using materials such as Corten steel to create raised beds. Use quality stone or bricks to make steps leading between the levels.

HGN312.gardenstory.indd 128 09/06/2025 10:36:36

