

European Garden Heritage Network - Award 2015
Award ceremony in Hamburg 4th of September 2015

**Laudation for category:
“Special Award of the Schloss Dyck Foundation”
.- Best creative Use of Plants**

by

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**Winner in the category:
*Hermannshof Gardens, Weinheim/Germany***

In parks and gardens there are two core assets – we as human beings and green plants creating environment and its beauty. In that context - planting design is of course very crucial. One of our great challenges will always be how to create that design. New styles for new habitats need to be developed continuously.

One of those, recently developed, is an innovative nature-inspired planting that highlights perennials and grasses'. It is inspired by wild plant communities, but isn't just a copy, it's a creative abstraction, put into a horticultural form. Species are scattered and intermingled as in a wildflower meadow. This scheme is created within, what we know as, the “New German Style”. One of its most distinguished examples is located in a region with unusually mild climate where summers tend to be hot and dry. It is the Garden of Hermannshof in Weinheim.

The garden has been open to the public, free of charge, since 1983, as a Display and Trial garden (Schau- und Sichtungsgarten), where plants and plant combinations are assessed for research purposes, as well as displayed for everybody's enjoyment.

The two most important features of the garden are the Mixed perennial planting and Prairie style plantings:

The mixed perennial planting is the result of a selection based on ecological and aesthetic criteria. The innovation is that plants can be bought for a particular area, the number being calculated on an area basis, and can then be planted at equal distances at random by relatively unskilled personnel.

The prairie style planting provides a lot of design-possibilities for cities that require attractive, yet low, maintenance greenery. Prairie plants are recently being recognized in Europe for their aesthetic and functional potential. The reason is obvious; prairie plants offer new opportunities for low maintenance plantings for urban, open areas such as parking lots, traffic islands and grounds of commercial buildings. They may also be used in smaller private gardens and in amusement parks as well.

The contemporary planting design at Hermannshof is ecologically based and aims to match habitat with plants. The park displays a wide range of large informal plantings, arranged according to Professor Richard Hansen's ecological planting habitats - including woodland, woodland margin, steppe and rocky steppe, dry- mesic- and moist open ground, water margin and water.

The area of steppe, where free-draining soil mimics the arid zones found in Eastern Europe, is for example, a good model for dry urban environments.

Each area contains both wild species and cultivars, but the latter are only used if they maintain the proportion and elegance of their wild ancestors. Plants in each bed are arranged much as they grow in

nature, and it is this that makes the Hermannshof plantings different from what we know as typical English style of planting borders.

There is also another very interesting and important element in Hermannshof: It's about the love and headache of every gardener – it's the way of carrying on the **maintenance**.

For ten years Hermannshof Garden has been carefully recording the person-minutes per square meter required to care for particular perennial-based plantings.

Detailed research at Hermannshof over the last ten years shows that an intelligent strategy for maintenance can be built around plant survival strategies. I quote:

"We take the three survival strategy divisions of plants, discussed by Emeritus Professor J. Philip. Grime from University of Sheffield (2001)

- *competitors (C),*
- *stress-tolerators (S) and*
- *pioneers or ruderals (R)*

and group different planting styles beneath each one. Further, we relate maintenance clearly to what we call the 'growth type' of the plants in each area: "competitive planting types", "stress tolerant planting types" and "ruderal planting types". The success of using this ecological-strategy-guided approach is that the appropriate plant selection is used for the environment. This is not an iron rule, but it is the best way to succeed in reducing maintenance".

I personally just add – do listen to try and error and research from Hermannshof

The industrialist family Freudenberg had acquired the villa in 1888. The engineering firm Freudenberg still owns it today, using the residence for corporate functions and conferences. The garden is mainly privately funded by the Freudenberg group (74%); the rest is funded by the Weinheim City Council (17%) and by plant sales in the garden (9%).

Money is very well spent as over 180.000 pleased visitors have been in Hermannshof in 2014. Those visitors have got knowledge and inspiration for their gardens. Consequently, the number of visitors confirms that the jury's vote for Hermannshof for the Special Award of the Schloss Dyck Foundation is shared by many.

Please welcome the Director of Hermannshof, from now on also known worldwide as the Director of **"Best Creative Use of Plants"**.

Welcome to Cassian Schmidt!