



KLOSTER SCHOENTHAL 1145

The Garden in Gross-Schönthal

The garden in Gross-Schönthal is located outside the walls of the monastery grounds. Before assuming its current form, it served as a kitchen garden for the farm. It is neither a historical site, nor a cloister garden in the traditional sense. It is classical in form, with paths running along the edges and crossing at the centre, which is graced with a fountain. This limestone monolith dates from the 17th century and was brought here from a park near Geneva. The garden has been laid in more recent times and is modelled on cloister and cottage gardens.

In the ten years in which we (mainly Astrid) have been taking care of the garden, we have worked according to the principle of permanent metamorphosis, both throughout the seasons, and over the course of the years. Our focus is always on constantly changing colours and shapes. The garden is never completely cleared and newly planted with off-the-shelf annuals.

As the garden is situated at the bottom of the valley of the Schönthal stream, the soil is rich in humus, fresh, full of nutrients, and not over-fertilized. The vegetation has developed out of the specifics of the location. The garden space is shared by indigenous and non-local plants. The former grow here spontaneously or have found their way here from the surrounding region. The latter have settled at this venue, and their colours and shapes fit in perfectly: they are all traditional and less well-known ornamental and garden plants, mainly from the Eurasian-North American spectrum of flora. Even plants generally regarded as weeds play a positive role in the garden at certain times and in certain quantities: wild forget-me-nots, wood sorrel, upright oxalis, creeping buttercups and the like cover the soil, fill in gaps, and of course flower.

The essential element behind the garden design is the dynamism of growth and decay. This is observed, accompanied and guided with great care. Interventions are being made continually: plants are discretely propped up, which is often necessary after heavy rain, or else selectively pruned, which promotes further blossoming. They are also thinned out or even planted elsewhere.

Any impression of a garden that is not looked after is deceptive!

The garden is characterised not just by the colours, but also by the shapes of the plants, which range from sturdy and wedged to delicate and filigree. The individual species never stand alone, apart from their neighbours. Instead they grow in beds, as one or a group of species, always interplaying with their immediate surroundings. Maturing and ripe seed heads – assuming they still look good – add to the charm of the overall impression.



KLOSTER SCHOENTHAL 1145

Wilted blooms and leaves start to be cut away in summer, and all the more so in autumn. The robust plants remain, withstanding the winter and often defying considerable falls of snow. Then, with the approach of spring, the last dry and usually broken stalks are removed, and the garden is ready for the next year. When the snow has melted, between mid-March and mid-April, as the case may be, plants spring to life again. Soon large numbers of snowdrops, wood cowslips, cress and violets are unfurling their petals.

Vegetation moves forward quickly in May and June: the predominant flowers are forget-me-nots, moonwort, Solomon's seal, columbine, leopard's bane, mountain cornflower, orange hawkweed, wallflowers, valerian, Jacob's ladder and iris. The predominant colours are white, sky blue, bright purple, pink and light yellow. The abundance and density of the flowers increase towards the summer solstice, reaching a high point between early June and mid-August: hop marjoram, red sally, rose willow herb, sorrel, bluebells, black-eyed Susan, helenium, cephalaria, knapweed and mullein mean that the dominant shades now are deep yellow, orange and red.

Autumn also has a lot to offer. Despite their lifespan being lengthened by prudent trimming, the summer flowers gradually fade, while the real late-flowering plants appear: new Belgium asters, sunflowers, honey melon sage.

Medicinal plants are dispersed throughout the whole garden – some planted, some seeded. They are part of the inventory and not used systematically. Unlike the tea and spice herbs! These have to be easily got at for use in the kitchen. That is why, though integrated into the cloister garden, except for the mighty Marsh mallow, they stand together in easily visible and accessible groups – and in the sun!



KLOSTER SCHOENTHAL 1145

Medicinal plants not used as tea or spice herbs

(list incomplete)

- Mutterkraut / Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*)
- Schwertlilien/ diverse / Iris, various (*Iris* sp., among others *Iris germanica*)
- Blauer Eisenhut / Monkshood (*Aconitum napellus* s.l.)
- Königskerzen, Mullein (mostly *Verbascum grandiflorum*)
- Nachtkerze / Evening star (*Oenothera biennis* s.l.)
- Schlaf-Mohn / Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*)
- Klatsch-Mohn / Corn poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*)
- Wegwarte / Common chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)
- Kümmel / Caraway (*Carum carvi*)
- Beinwell / Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)
- Sonnenhut / Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)

Tea and spice herbs

- Muskateller-Salbei / Clary sage (*Salvia sclarea*)
- Echte Salbei / Common sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
- Echter Thymian / Common thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- Zitronen-Melisse / Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
- Goldmelisse/Indianernessel / Cirmson beebalml (*Monarda didyma*)
- Bohnenkraut / Summer savory (*Satureja hortensis*)
- Basilikum / Sweet basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)
- Lavendel / Lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*)
- Borretsch / Borage (*Borago officinalis*)
- Ringelblume / Pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)
- Grosse Brennessel / Comon Nettle (*Urtica dioeca*)
- Eibisch / Marsh mallow (*Althaea officinalis*)

Astrid and Michael Zemp; November 2013