

Markus Zeiler  
with photographs by Peter Allgaier



The Gardens of  
**MAINAU**  
**FLOWER ISLAND**



Ulmer



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# INTRODUCTION

Mainau Island with its nickname “Flower Island in Lake Constance” is famous far beyond the German border. With its great diversity of exceptional plants and an average of 1.2 million visitors every year, the Botanic Garden and castle grounds are among the most significant and most frequently visited gardens in Germany. The island is a paradise for plant and garden lovers as well as a place to relax for both tourists and locals.

The numerous Protected Area Categories aiming to safeguard the precious nature and cultural landscape show that Mainau and its surroundings are an absolute jewel and of great importance in many respects: The island is listed in the heritage register as a whole, in parts and also as a cultural monument of particular importance. Furthermore, the whole island is situated inside the landscape conservation area “Bodenseeufer” (Lake Constance shore) and where the bridge links the island to the mainland, Mainau is bordered by two nature reserves serving as an important retreat for birds.

From a geological point of view, Mainau Island consists of molasse sandstone. During the different ice ages which formed Lake Constance, the rock that is today Mainau Island remained untouched by the destructive force of the ice and was covered with gravel and sand. Today, the island is approx. 395 metres above sea level on its shoreline and at the highest point of the park it is up to 425 metres above sea level.

## LAKE CONSTANCE AS AN IMPORTANT CLIMATE PARAMETER

With its large amount of water, Lake Constance has a great impact on Mainau’s climate. In spring, when the water of this natural air conditioning system is still cold and only warming up slowly, the plants have a slower bud growth compared to other, similar regions, because the air temperature is also slower to warm up. This reduces the risk of late frost which is particularly beneficial for cold-sensitive plants. In summer, the sun heats up Lake Constance and in the autumn, this energy warms up the surrounding air as temperatures fall. As the famous Lake Constance fog forms, a number of trees and shrubs growing on climate borders now have the possibility to let their wood mature in preparation for the upcoming winter.

Climate data collected in the reference period from 1981 to 2010 show an average temperature of 9.4° Celsius and annual rainfall amounting to 830 mm. Even if Mainau Island is well-known for its subtropical vegetation in some parts, the island still sees low temperatures, ice and snow in winter. Temperatures can even drop to lows in the negative double-digits as was last the case in February 2012 over a period of several days. Usually the snow is very wet and heavy which is a problem, especially for evergreens.

Mainau Island and the area around it was settled relatively early. There are signs of pre-historic stilt houses in the shallow water. Since the beginning of the 8th century, the is-



Surrounded by exotic summer plants like *Ricinus communis* ('Carmencita Bright Red') and *Erythrina crista-galli*, the Grand Duke Frederick I of Baden watches over his park. After buying Mainau in 1853, he gradually turned it into a stately garden, thus laying the foundations for today's castle garden and the Botanic Garden.

land belonged to the eminent Monastic Island of Reichenau, situated about 10 kilometres to the south in the so-called Untersee. From 1272, Mainau belonged to the Order of Teutonic Knights. The Knights set up a base, a so-called commandery, which belonged to the Bailiwick (administrative unit) of Alsace-Burgundy.

The Teutonic Knights lived on Mainau Island for over 500 years and in that time agriculture was the economic base. Wine grapes were grown on the southern slopes, there were extensive fruit orchards on the plateau and grain-fields and meadows near the lakeshore. Old maps show geometrically arranged gardens; their purpose was probably to feed the resi-

dents. With the dissolution of the Order of Teutonic Knights, Mainau became part of the newly formed Grand Duchy of Baden in 1806. But the grand dukes had little interest in the island so finally the Hungarian Prince Nicolas Esterházy bought it in 1827. Useless buildings near the castle were torn down as well as the fortifications which had become obsolete. He introduced the first foreign trees and shrubs to Mainau Island.

In 1830, a *Liriodendron tulipifera* was planted on the border to today's Arboretum. The fig espalier on the southern façade of the castle is also said to go back to plants Esterházy brought to Mainau.

Prince Esterházy's descendants sold the island to Countess Katharina of Langenstein in 1839, she sold it to her daughter and in 1853, the future Grand Duke Frederick I of Baden bought Mainau and used it as summer palace.

#### A GREEN PARADISE FOR THE GRAND DUKE OF BADEN

Frederick I of Baden who married the Prussian princess Louise in 1856, daughter of the future Emperor William I, was a passionate plant collector and dendrologist. Immediately after buying the island, he continued what Nicolas Esterházy had started by tearing down more buildings and fortifications and creating new paths and seating areas. In the process, more or less exotic trees and shrubs were gradually planted on the island. As soon as 1856, an alley of mulberry trees was created in order to breed silkworms. When their daughter Viktoria was born in 1862, Frederick I and Louise planted a large-leaved lime tree known today on Mainau Island as the Lime-Tree "Viktoria". Today's Arboretum saw its beginnings in 1864 when the first trees were planted.

Grand Duke Frederick I died in 1907, a very old man, on his beloved Mainau Island. Out of respect for her husband's work, his widow ordered that nothing shall be changed in the park that was now finished. After implementing this for 25 years, the park had become overgrown.

#### THE SWEDISH PRINCE

The son of Louise and Frederick I, the Grand Duke Frederick II of Baden, passed Mainau to his sister Viktoria. In 1881, Viktoria of Baden married the future King of Sweden Gustav V and since 1907 she was Queen Viktoria of Sweden. When she died in 1930, her son William inherited the island and he transferred the ad-

ministration of Mainau to his only son Lennart. He married the Swedish commoner Karin Nissvandt in 1932, thus losing all titles and rights as Prince of Sweden. The couple decided to turn the island in Lake Constance into their home and to make a living from it. Only in the 1950s he received the title of Count of Wisborg by the Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxemburg.

So they started to change the grand ducal park into an international tourist attraction. First Lennart Bernadotte – as he once wrote himself – started to clean up the swimming jungle. By removing numerous trees and shrubs which were invading the valuable exotic plants, he gave the park a new, attractive look. At the same time, he increasingly opened the island to the public. The visitors wanted to buy post-cards and have a coffee on the island: the tourist attraction Mainau was born.

After the Second World War, the Botanic Garden was gradually extended. In the process, the Italian Rose Garden was enlarged, the Walk of Wild and Shrub Roses was created and the Italian Style Floral and Water Cascade was constructed.

Mainau became more and more popular and especially in the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called German Adriatic Sea was the place to go for a holiday. Count Lennart Bernadotte, who had re-established the German Horticultural Society at the request of Heinrich Luebke, transferred in the early 1980s the management of the company to his second wife Sonja whom he had married in 1972. With her he founded the Lennart Bernadotte Foundation (Lennart-Bernadotte-Stiftung), today sole shareholder of the tourism company Mainau GmbH.

In the time of Countess Sonja Bernadotte, who followed her husband at the head of the German Horticultural Society, the Butterfly



After the death of Countess Sonja Bernadotte af Wisborg in October 2008, the “Sonja and Lennart Bernadotte Square” was created by the Archway Building, informing about the life of the two Mainau designers. Embedded in a sea of Triumph Tulips (‘Rem’s Favourite’, ‘Jan Reus’, ‘Black Jack’, ‘Gavota’ and ‘Havran’), the two busts are facing the castle.

House was constructed in 1996 and the Palm House in 1998 among other things. Mainau Island’s mainland entrance was redesigned, restaurants were refurbished and events such as a garden and lifestyle market and open-air concerts were initiated. Totally respecting her husband’s tradition, Countess Sonja Bernadotte managed the company Mainau GmbH with the aim of enthusing people about nature and gardening.

When Count Lennart Bernadotte died in 2004 aged 95 and Countess Sonja Bernadotte in 2008 aged only 64, their two eldest children, Countess Bettina Bernadotte and Count Bjoern Bernadotte, took over the company Mainau GmbH. True to their parents’ philosophy, they are now in charge of the Flower Island and undertake new projects for the development of Mainau Island as a place of recreation, relaxation and inspiration for gardening.