



fine
Gardening

DESIGN IDEAS

EXPERT TIPS FOR CREATING
YOUR DREAM GARDEN

From the editors of Fine Gardening



Hello and welcome to our *Fine Gardening* community!

We're happy to have you join this group of engaged and passionate gardeners. In the following pages you will find a variety of planting plans and outdoor design and living ideas to help make your landscape the best it can be.

You'll see most of the plants are clearly identified, too, which will help you replicate any eye-catching combination in your our space. We did this because at Fine Gardening, inspiration always comes with a full set of instructions.

Best wishes for a successful gardening season,

Danielle

Danielle Sherry, executive editor



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BREAKING UP A SEA OF GREEN

Add interest in the shade with color, pattern, and texture



It is tempting to fill shady areas with broad swaths of reliable ground covers, but a well-curated palette of plants will provide more interest and variety all season long. When choosing or adding plants, think about the color and texture of the leaves and how they will look next to their chosen companions throughout the year. Don't forget to add some bright foliage to the mix, sited next to plants with dark- or cool-colored leaves to enhance the impact.

GARDEN ORNAMENTS ADD STRUCTURE

Playful iron "fronds" and an understated birdbath act as focal points in this foliage-based composition. Even a small amount of water brings reflected light and a sense of movement to a static garden scene.



SITE A HIGH-IMPACT PLANT NEXT TO SUBDUED COMPANIONS

Bowles' golden sedge (*Carex elata* 'Aurea', Zones 5–9) looks brilliant alongside a hosta edged in cool blue and the deep green foliage of 'Hot Lips' turtlehead (*Chelone lyonii* 'Hot Lips', Zones 3–8).

FINE-TEXTURED GROUND COVERS FILL FOREGROUND SPACE

Blue phlox (*Phlox divaricata* 'Blue Moon', Zones 3–8) and Chinese astilbe (*Astilbe chinensis* var. *pumila*, Zones 4–8) are reliable choices to edge a shady bed. Both have long-lasting foliage that's attractive before and after the blooms peak.

Designed by Janice Becker for her garden in Deerfield, Illinois

REDUCE THE WORK, BUT NOT THE LOOKS

This design approach ensures that you will have more moments enjoying your garden than working on it

1. CHOOSE HARDWORKING PLANTS

Some people have to spend hours to look good; other people make it happen in just a few minutes. You want plants from the second group. A little effort once or twice a year is all it takes to keep them looking great.

2. USE MORE OF THE SAME

You could perform different tasks on numerous plants throughout the year, or you could handle much of your work at once by repeating the same plant in the same area.

3. SPACE TO ENCOURAGE AIR CIRCULATION

A lush garden is crammed with plants, which makes it hard for air to move and encourages disease. Judicious editing keeps air moving without adding noticeable holes in your design.

4. GROUP PLANTS WITH SIMILAR NEEDS

Rather than Plant A needing one thing, Plant B requiring something else, and Plant C needing a third thing, make sure that Plants A, B, and C need the same thing.

Designed by Staci Crooks for her garden in Edmond, Washington

CURVE APPEAL

Pleasant lines anchor a peaceful, cohesive design



CURVED BEDS EMBRACE THE FRONT WALK, while lush plantings contribute graceful organic forms that anchor and echo the lines of the house.

The curvilinear elements of the landscape vary in scale and formality and are repeated in both the organic and hardscaped elements of the design. Ellipses, arcs, and organic curves are balanced by solid straight lines. Open spaces, including the pool, balance the massing of the house and the textural exuberance of densely planted beds.



AN OVAL SWIMMING POOL IS THE HEART OF THE BACK GARDEN.

The pale pavers that surround the pool offer visual contrast and a wide, safe path around the water's edge. An arbor supported by columns creates garden rooms with a sense of enclosure.



3 GREAT PLANTS WITH CURVES

Arching stems, rounded leaves, and mounded forms lend a sense of orderly abundance to this garden. Here are three key plants that will lend curve appeal to any garden.

- 1 **'Sagae' hosta** (*Hosta 'Sagae'*, Zones 3–8)

Subtly variegated 'Sagae' flanks the steps leading to the front door. This hosta grows up to 3 feet tall and wide, pairing well with equally substantial 'Elegans' hosta (*H. seiboldii* 'Elegans', Zones 4–9).



- 2 **Sensitive fern** (*Onoclea sensibilis*, Zones 4–8)

Ferns' arching stems and beautifully textured fronds are prominent throughout the Feldman garden. Sensitive fern, a North American native, thrives in shady, moist soil.



- 3 **Japanese forest grass** (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola', Zones 5–9)

Graceful, cascading blades have a fine texture that is the perfect foil for bolder foliage. The golden leaves of 'Aureola' lend brightness to partial shade and look especially appealing next to plants with blue-green leaves.



Designed by Catherine Feldman for her home in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TEXTURE

If there were a secret ingredient to successful gardens, it would be texture. Sometimes hard to define, “texture” describes the surface quality of something—be it a plant’s fuzzy blossoms or the glossiness of a metal bistro chair. This garden in Tiburon, California, is a perfect study of how a landscape filled with tons of texture can create a visually striking scene. The fleshy succulent foliage is all the more eye-catching when planted near an array of fluffy ornamental grasses. And although the bright reddish-orange leaves of the bromeliads in the forefront draw attention with their vibrant color, it’s their smooth—almost liquid—texture that keeps you staring. Below are a few other categories of texture and some key garden elements that define them in this spot.

1

COARSE

The rough surface of the natural wood bench fits into this category and is hard to ignore when highlighted by the smooth leaves of the foxtail agave (*Agave attenuata*, Zones 7–11).



2

FEATHERY

Most ornamental grasses fall into this group, including ‘Karley Rose’ Oriental fountain grass (*Pennisetum orientale* ‘Karley Rose’, Zones 5–9).



3

BRISTLY

If it reminds you of a toothbrush head, then it’s probably this type of texture. Here, a bloom from an aeonium (*Aeonium* cv., Zones 9–11) is the perfect example.



Designed by Roger and Mary Greenberg for their garden in Tiburon, California

SHADY PLANTING IDEAS

Go beyond green with these colorful groupings



◀ SAME COLOR, DIFFERENT TEXTURE

The textures of the hosta and the fern couldn't be more different, but their colors are a perfect match. The similarity is emphasized by the contrasting blue blooms of the corydalis.

1. 'Blue Panda' corydalis (*Corydalis flexuosa* 'Blue Panda', Zones 6–8)
2. Chinese lace fern (*Selaginella braunii*, Zones 8–11)
3. Hosta (*Hosta* cv., Zones 3–9)

—Designed by Barbara Weirich for her garden in Benton Harbor, Michigan

▶ TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PARTIAL SUN

Many sun plants can take some shade. Blooms might be fewer, or the plants might decline over time, but some plants, such as alliums, are inexpensive. Tucking some in amid hostas yields a stunning effect and is worth the time and effort.

1. 'Globemaster' allium (*Allium* 'Globemaster', Zones 5–10)
2. 'June' hosta (*Hosta* 'June', Zones 3–9)
3. 'Silver Bay' hosta (*Hosta* 'Silver Bay', Zones 3–9)
4. Ligularia (*Ligularia* cv., Zones 4–8)

—Designed by Janice Becker for her garden in Deerfield, Illinois





1| **'Silver Shadow' astelia**



5| **'Blue Ice' bluestar**



8| **'Purple Gem' rhododendron**

9 GREAT LOW-GROWING PLANTS

Shorter plants deserve some love. True, they aren't hulking beasts, drawing your eye from a mile away, but they can be focal points.

The following are some of my favorite small plants whose texture, color, or form is hard to ignore.

1 FOOT TALL AND UNDER

1. **'Silver Shadow' astelia**

Astelia 'Silver Shadow'

Zones: 8–10

Conditions: Full sun; well-drained soil

2. **'Cotton Tail' thrift**

Armeria maritima 'Cotton Tail'

Zones: 3–8

Conditions: Full sun to partial shade; well-drained soil

3. **'Hocus Pocus' geranium**

Geranium pratense 'Hocus Pocus'

Zones: 3–9

Conditions: Full sun to partial shade; moist, well-drained soil

2 FEET TALL AND UNDER

4. **Autumn moor grass**

Sesleria autumnalis

Zones: 5–8

Conditions: Full sun to partial shade; well-drained soil

5. **'Blue Ice' bluestar**

Amsonia 'Blue Ice'

Zones: 4–9

Conditions: Full sun to partial shade; moist, well-drained soil

6. **'Elsie's Gold' sedum**

Sedum 'Elsie's Gold'

Zones: 3–9

Conditions: Full sun; well-drained soil

3 FEET TALL AND UNDER

7. **'Blue Gem' mountain plum pine**

Podocarpus lawrencei 'Blue Gem'

Zones: 7–9

Conditions: Full sun; well-drained soil

8. **'Purple Gem' rhododendron**

Rhododendron 'Purple Gem'

Zones: 4–8

Conditions: Full sun to partial shade; well-drained soil

9. **'Merrist Wood Cream' shrubby rockrose**

× *Halimicistus wintonensis*

'Merrist Wood Cream'

Zones: 8–10

Conditions: Full sun; well-drained soil

KEEPING A LOW PROFILE

If you don't want plants blocking your view, try a design that is as dynamic as it is functional

Keeping the plantings under 3 feet tall might imply a boring and static landscape. But thoughtful plant placement and a varied hardscape help this space really shine, without obstructing the view from the house.



Designed by Susan Calhoun, owner of and principal designer at Plantwoman Design on Bainbridge Island, Washington.



SPACES THAT WORK

Breaking your property into zones helps define the way you live on your land

BY JULIE MOIR MESSERVY

In this age of digital devices and screens, our need for time and space in the out-of-doors is essential to our physical, mental, and even spiritual health. One way to engage nature is to create a landscape around your house that draws you and your loved ones outside. And guess what—it's just not that hard to create a landscape that works. In the following pages, you'll find a host of visual ideas as well as design tips and essential information that will get you started. Be inspired!



Text and photos from *Landscaping Ideas That Work* (The Taunton Press, 2013), excerpted and edited with permission of The Taunton Press, Inc.



MAKING SPACE

Your property, much like your house, is composed of a series of spaces that function in different ways from one another. Understanding the purpose and possibilities for each of these zones around the house helps you break down the design of your landscape so that it's not quite so overwhelming.

Like your front hall or foyer, the front yard acts as a welcoming zone and entry area into the property. Similar to your den, living room, or dining room, the backyard creates wonderful opportunities for family gathering, play, and getting away. And like a corridor or hallway in your house, a side yard offers an attractive passage that links spaces together.

Depending upon the amount of light present and the topography of each, these spaces can look and feel quite different from one another. A sunny front yard will feature a very different planting palette from a shady side garden; a backyard that nestles into a planted hillside will feel far more private than a grassy front yard that opens onto the street. As always, your own aesthetic preferences should influence how each space works and feels.

UNITE GARAGE AND HOUSE WITH HARDSCAPING.

An easy-to-install concrete-paver terrace marries garage and house as an open-air room where dining and entertaining can take place.



PRIVACY IS VALUED BOTH INSIDE AND OUT.

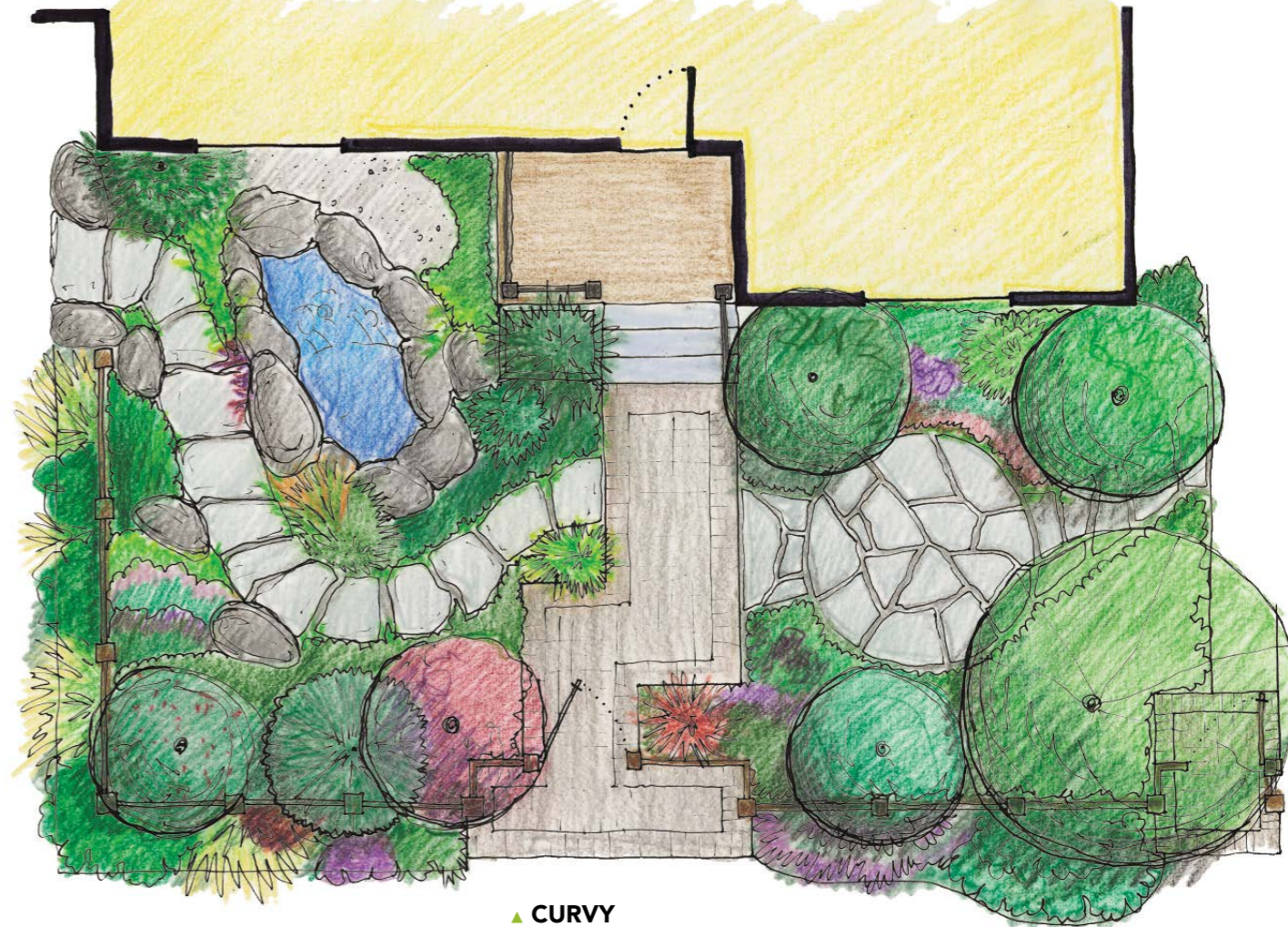
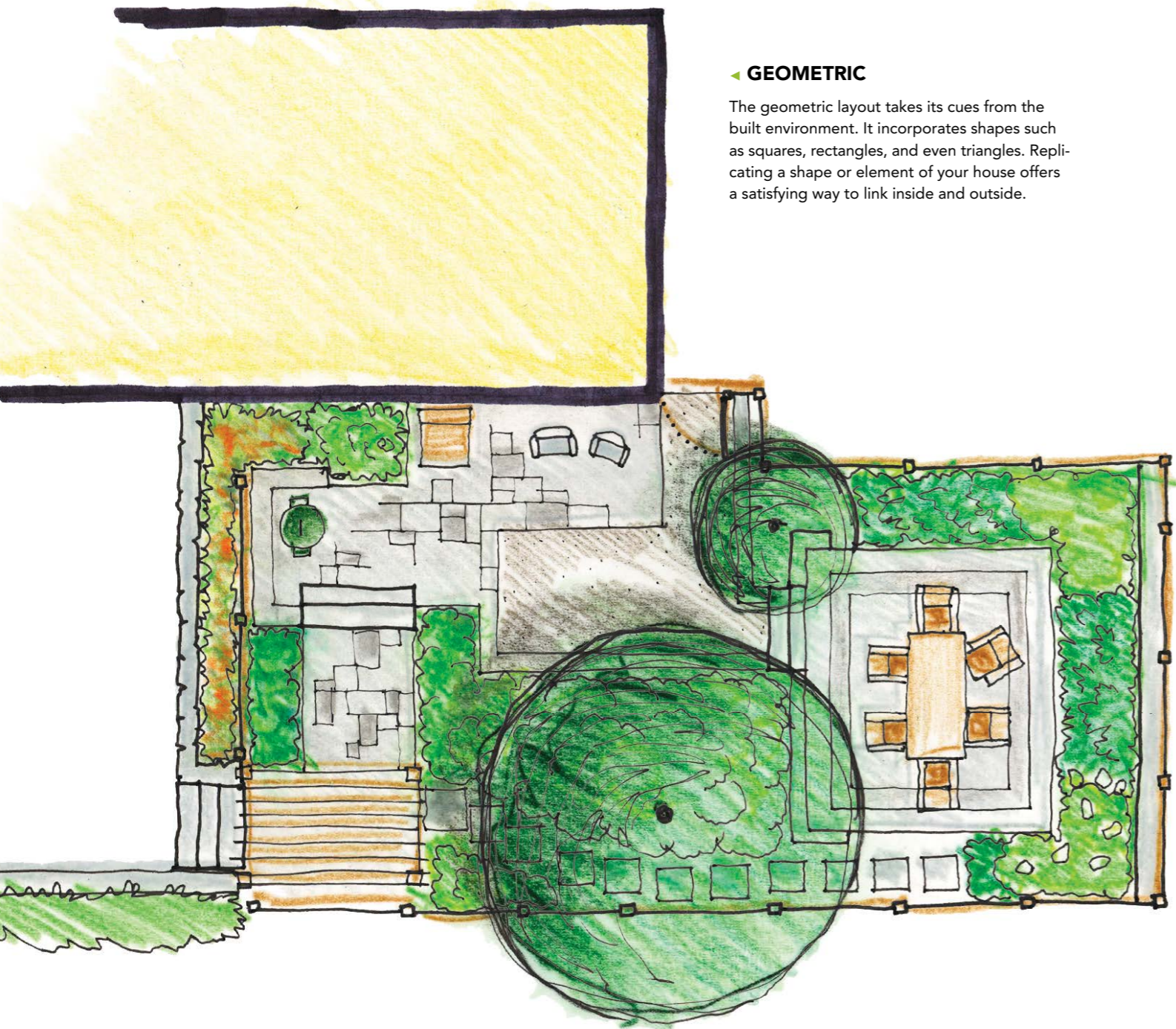
Tall curtains can be unfurled when an intimate evening outside is desired.

DEFINE YOUR STYLE

Which do you prefer—geometric, curvy, or linear? These basic layouts are good starting points for making spaces that work.

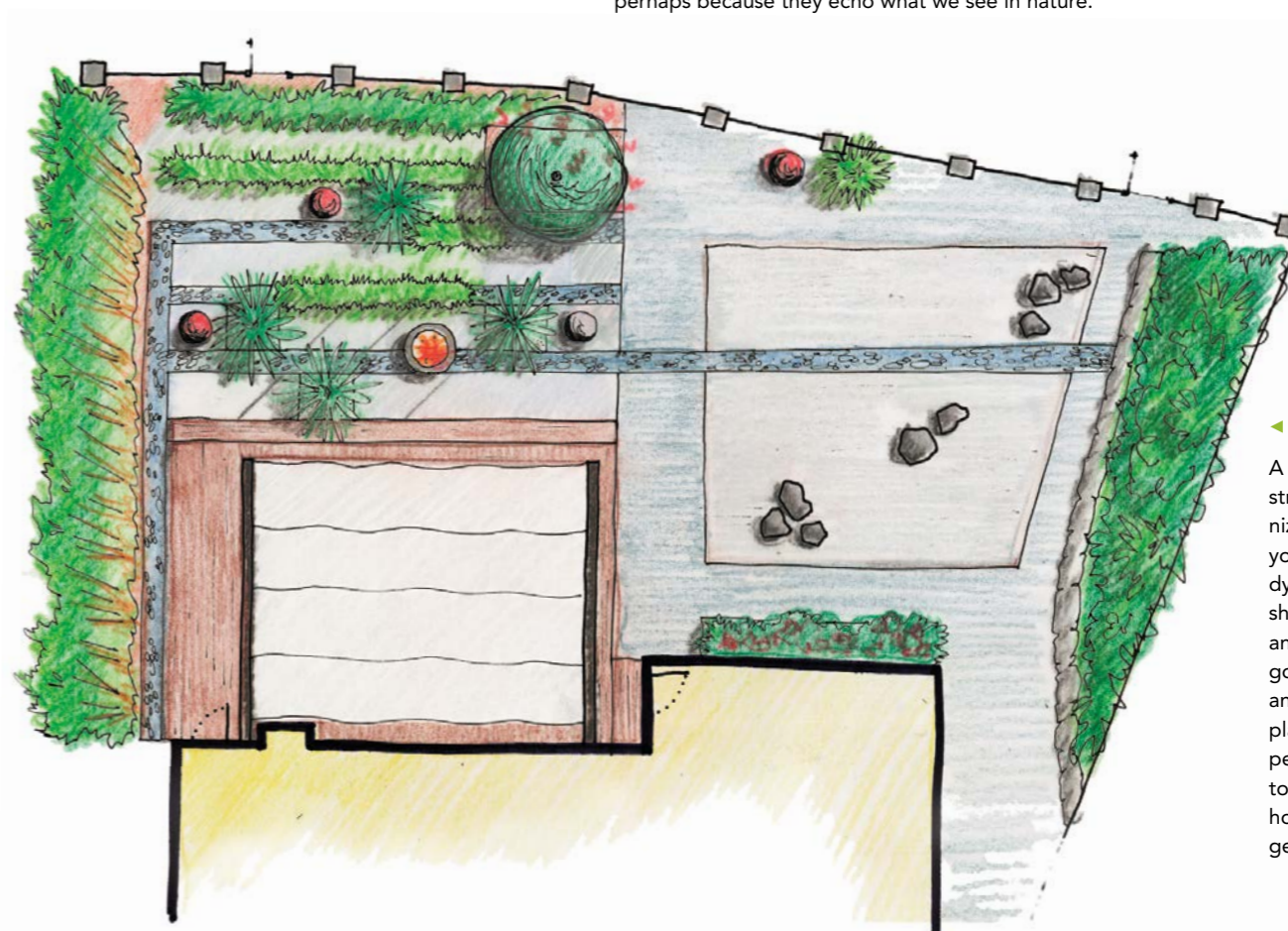
◀ GEOMETRIC

The geometric layout takes its cues from the built environment. It incorporates shapes such as squares, rectangles, and even triangles. Replicating a shape or element of your house offers a satisfying way to link inside and outside.



▲ CURVY

This design includes spaces that are composed of curving lines rather than straight ones. Soft arcing shapes, circles, ovals, and S-curves are appealing, perhaps because they echo what we see in nature.



◀ LINEAR

A linear design uses straight lines to organize the spaces around your house to form a dynamic interrelationship between structure and landscape. Pergolas, paths, patios, and enclosures can be placed parallel, perpendicular, or diagonal to the plane of your house, creating energetic alignments.

TURF ISN'T THE ONLY OPTION FOR THE FRONT YARD. With some advance planning and the proper plant selection, you can replace that sea of green with a xeriscape.



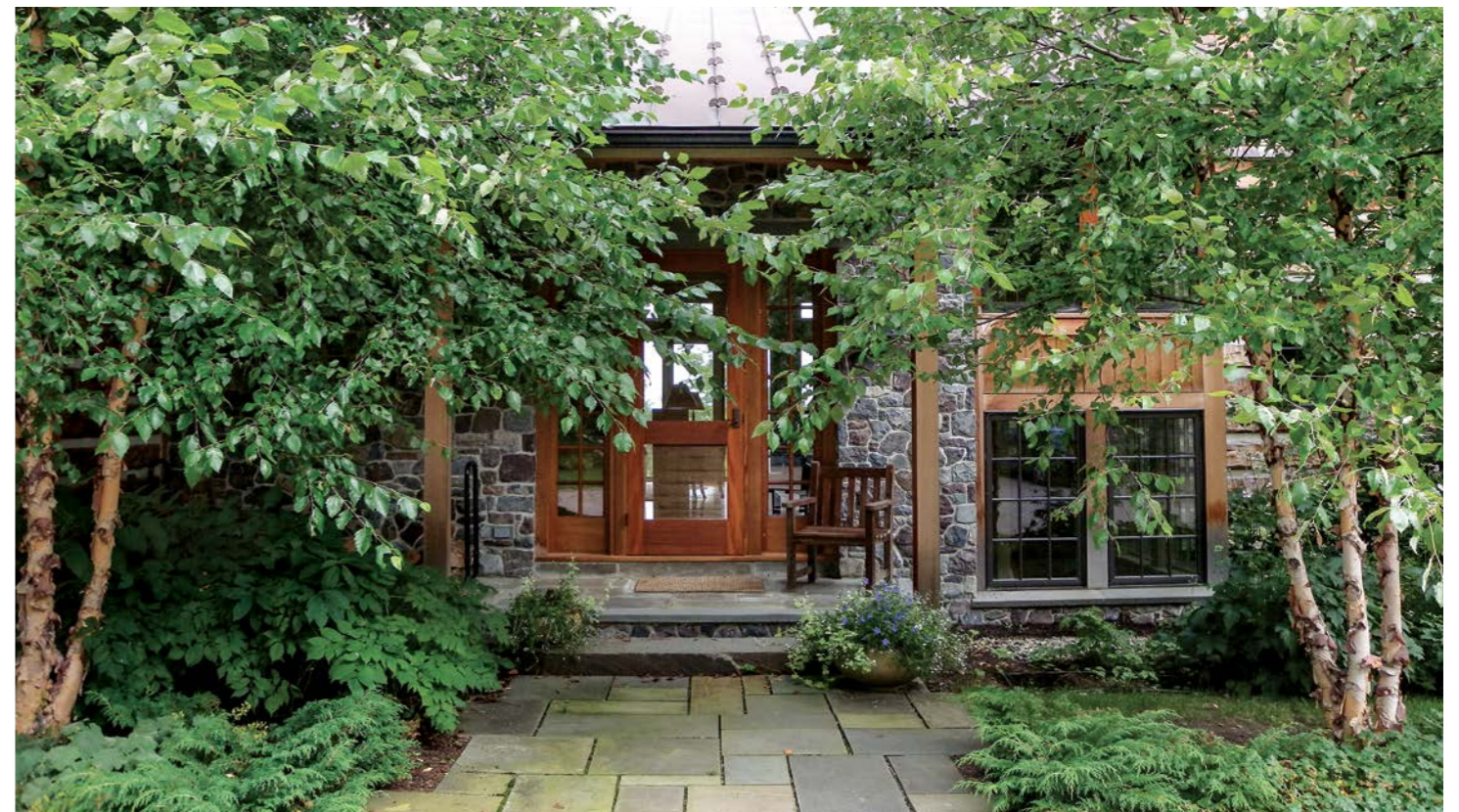
LET IT RAIN. This suburban home enjoyed a nice large sweep of lawn, but the homeowners decided to create a rain garden in the drainage swale, allowing runoff to leach right into the “river” of plantings that now grace the front yard.

FRONT YARDS

As properties shrink in size and space is at a premium, front yards are taking on new roles to better support the life of the family. Rather than the typical broad swath of front lawn, the front yard has also become a welcoming entryway as well as a comfortable living space. No longer just made up of overgrown foundation plantings, this valuable land at the front of the house is now planted with rain gardens, edible landscapes, and riotous perennial borders.

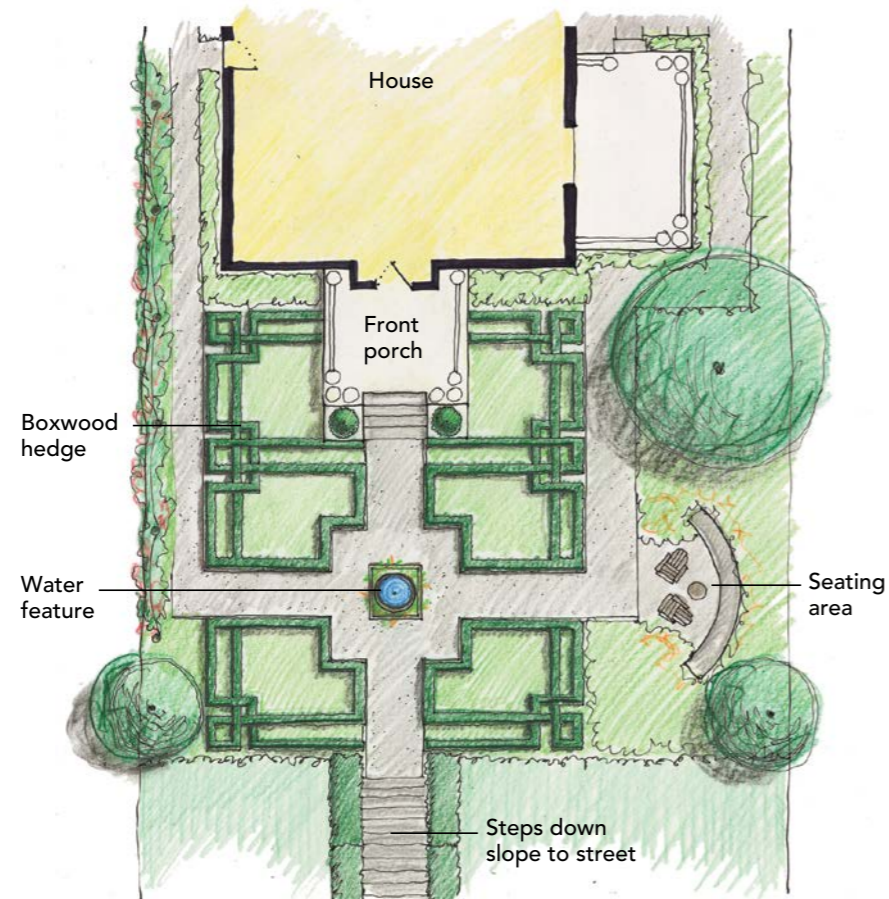
The layout of your front yard also conveys the first impression visitors have of your home and, by extension, your personality. A lively, colorful cottage garden centered on a painted bench gives passersby a very different image of who you are than would a bland open lawn.

There are special problems and opportunities that affect the design of a front yard. When the house sits far above or below the street, getting to it requires thoughtful planning. Similarly, if a house rests too close to a street, it pays to enclose the front yard, not only for safety's sake but also to increase usability. Reframe your thinking: What if you treated your front yard as though it were a backyard? How would it function differently from the way it does right now?



LEAD THE EYE AND GUESTS TO THE ENTRANCE. A stately planting of river birches, ferns, and ground covers flanks a blue-stone walkway, leading the eye and foot up to the front door.

Formal FRONT YARDS



When you own a formal house, it can pay to extend its proportions right out to the street. This formal front yard was created to complement the designer's own foursquare 1911 Colonial home in an older neighborhood in upstate New York. The boxwood-hedge parterre is laid out in an Arts and Crafts design, echoing a stained-glass window in the house. The garden is visible from several high vantage points (front and side porches and roof garden), so its intricate design can be fully appreciated from above. The owners, landscape architects A. J. Miller and Mariane Wheatley-Miller, fill the beds with evergreens and annuals.



FORMAL HAS ITS PLACE. Far more interesting than lawn, the parterre offers views from inside the house. The property sits on a natural drumlin high above the level of the street. Steps lead down to the sidewalk below.



A PARTERRE NEEDS A FOCAL POINT. The limestone water basin occupies the perfect center of the front garden, and the sound of the fountain can be heard in an adjacent seating area.

Stepped FRONT YARDS

Not everyone lives on level ground. Sloping front yards and houses that sit above or below the street require a series of stairs or steps to reach the front door. With thoughtful design, the experience of scaling a height can be exciting rather than arduous.

Think of a series of steps and landings as being like a waterfall. The front door is the “origin” of the falls; the front stoop or porch is where it “dams up” and then flows down the steps, pooling where landings occur, until it “spills” out to meet the road or sidewalk below.

Make the steps wide enough for two people to walk side by side, complete with landings every few feet of rise so that visitors can rest. For safety’s sake, place lights so that every step is well lit. Direct water runoff into adjacent planting beds or lawn areas so that the steps remain dry.



STEP UP THE HARDSCAPING. Landscape steps look and feel good when the riser is low and the tread is long. Here, two offset stairways are linked by a long level walkway before reaching the front door.



PLAN AHEAD FOR PLACES TO REST. These concrete stairs provide a handsome stepped walkway through a colorful garden. Note the location of the landings, which provide visitors with a place to catch their breath every four risers.



CONSIDER THE ARCHITECTURE. The wooden bollards on either side of this walkway echo the roofline and bring the architecture into the garden while scaling down the entrance to pedestrian traffic. Billowing grasses soften the house and the walkway’s squares and angles. Concrete pavers and dimensional wall blocks combine to create inexpensive but handsome planters.

Enclosed FRONT YARDS

When you place a wall, fence, or hedge around your front yard, you turn it into something special. An enclosed space along the sidewalk provides a protected place for sitting as well as an edge against which you can plant your favorite flowers. Your front yard becomes your front garden and shows off a bit of your personal style to the world.

Surrounding the front of your property with low hedges or fencing helps keep the world out and children in, while still allowing passersby to peek in and enjoy what they see. Such front yards present a useful alternative to traditional lawn-and-foundation-planting designs, especially where space is at a premium. Why not use the front of your house for living, entertaining, and playing, just as you do in the backyard, and enjoy this valuable piece of real estate?



ENTERTAIN IN THE FRONT FOR A CHANGE.

This front yard sits close to the street, yet the protection of a thick stucco wall creates an enclosed space for family dining and entertaining.



CREATE A SCREEN, NOT A BLOCKADE. An attractive wooden fence turns a front yard on a busy urban street into a private garden, yet the open design along the top of the fence prevents it from appearing unfriendly. A wide planting strip outside the fence means the view is as enjoyable from the street as it is from within the garden.

Romantic FRONT YARDS



◀ FOSTER ENCHANTMENT.

A curving brick walkway and gate (left welcomingly ajar) beckon visitors toward the front door. Typical cottage-garden plants of English ivy, zonal geraniums, ferns, and hydrangeas cover the landscape.

This stucco cottage would be as at home in a fairy tale as it is in a Southern California beachside community, thanks to its ivy-clad walls and cottage garden.

Romantic touches, such as the picket fence, enhance the quaint effect. The gently swooping fence is set well back from the sidewalk, creating a narrow front yard but ample space for ferns, hydrangeas, and potted plants placed where passersby can appreciate them.

Though enclosed with the low picket fence, this front yard feels open to the world. Visitors can peek in and imagine the hidden life behind the home's facade.



MARRY HOME, FURNITURE, AND GARDEN.

The white chairs, with their nautical blue cushions, invite us to inhabit them—even if only in our minds.

SIDE YARDS

▼ **FASHION A PATH TO LEAD THE WAY.** A diagonal path meanders from driveway to firepit terrace, located on the side of this property. A handsome covered porch adds yet another sitting spot.



Depending upon your property, a side yard can be a narrow sliver of space between buildings or an area wide enough to house a garage or even a terrace. In either case, a side yard can feel oddly separate from the rest of the property if its design doesn't include details—like plantings or hardscape features that are repeated in the front yard or backyard—that integrate the side yard into the entire design.

What unites most side yards is their function as a passageway between front yard and backyard. It is important to design a path that flows easily between spaces. Do you want a functional walkway that serves as the shortest distance between two often-visited points? Or would you like a meandering stepping-stone path that slows you down enough to notice a lovely plant, an attractive framed view, or an interesting focal point?

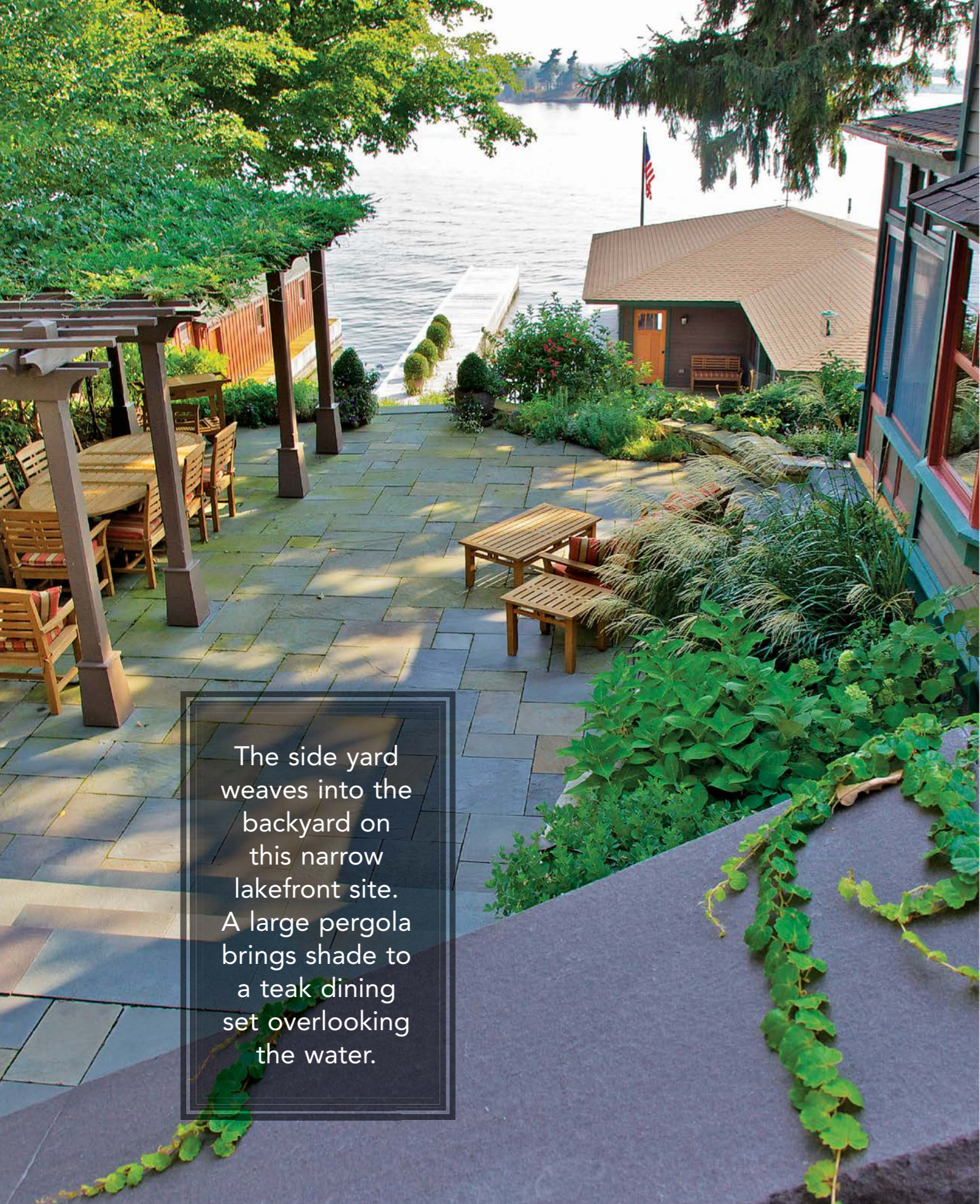
Hemmed in by buildings as these spaces can be, light and air circulation are often at issue. Where fencing is needed, the use of open styles of fencing can let in light and create a sense of spaciousness. Many useful and utilitarian items can be housed in a side yard—such as a toolshed, compost bin, dog run, or grill—because this space is often just out of public view.

In planning your side yard, consider the neighbors. If privacy is a concern, use a high fence or tall plantings to block visual and physical access between yards. By adding a gate, you can maintain a friendly relationship between the properties.

Similar to a front yard, a roomy side yard can also function the way a backyard does: for entertaining, dining, or relaxing. And if your kitchen door opens onto your side yard, it's a wonderful place to locate a grill or pizza oven. Just make sure to include a buffet table and some comfortable chairs nearby so that the grillmeister of the family can socialize while serving up the meal.



ENLARGE A TIGHT SPACE WITH PLANTS. A narrow slit looks wider with the addition of a hydrangea hedge and tendrils of ivy that curl over a path of regularly spaced double stepping-stones.



The side yard weaves into the backyard on this narrow lakefront site. A large pergola brings shade to a teak dining set overlooking the water.



LEAD GUESTS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

This side yard doubles as a front garden and informal entry porch. Friends and family enter this way.



MAKE EVERY INCH COUNT. A path of limestone pavers leads to a gate permitting entry to the back 40. Shade plantings fill the beds and settle the house into this handsome side yard.



THIS TINY BACKYARD HAS A CONTEMPORARY FEEL. Concrete and wood walls give privacy to the family when they dine outdoors.



BACKYARDS

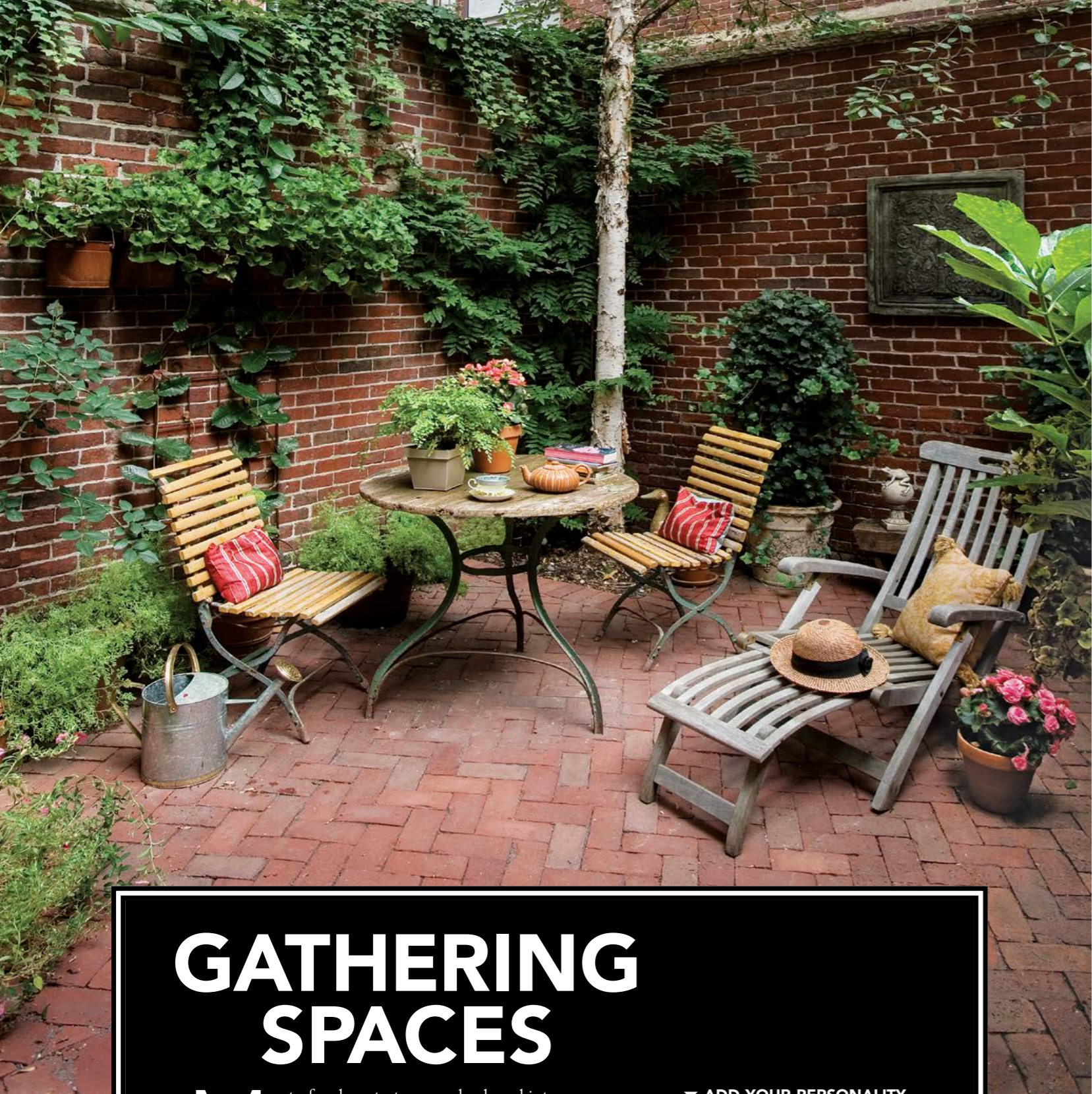
When we want to get outside, we usually gravitate to the backyard, where all manner of outdoor living can occur. Behind our house, protected from passersby or a neighbor's view, we feel the freedom to do—and be—whatever we want. The best backyards enjoy a comfortable relationship between inside and outside, visual screening from neighbors for privacy, and an interesting view or focal point, either on the property itself or beyond its bounds.

Whereas a front yard creates the first impression visitors will have of your home and should make you and your guests feel welcome, the backyard exists to lure people outside. It should look inviting from indoors, and it could serve any number of functions (and often several at once). Your backyard might be a space for entertaining and family dining; recreation and children's play; relaxing and enjoying quiet time; hobbies, such as gardening or painting; or just spending time outdoors (for all household members—human and otherwise). Even the tiniest backyard, thoughtfully designed, can accommodate most, if not all, of these needs for gathering, playing, and getting away.

Unless you're lucky enough to have a large property with grand vistas, you probably will want to enclose your backyard with a fence, hedge, or wall high enough to keep prying eyes out and children (and dogs) in. At the same time, adding large windows and French doors to the back of your house encourages easy visual and physical access between inside and out.

▲ **TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF ALL VIEWS.**

Big comfortable chairs set into a sunken terrace bring the inside out in this cozy backyard garden with an expansive view.



GATHERING SPACES

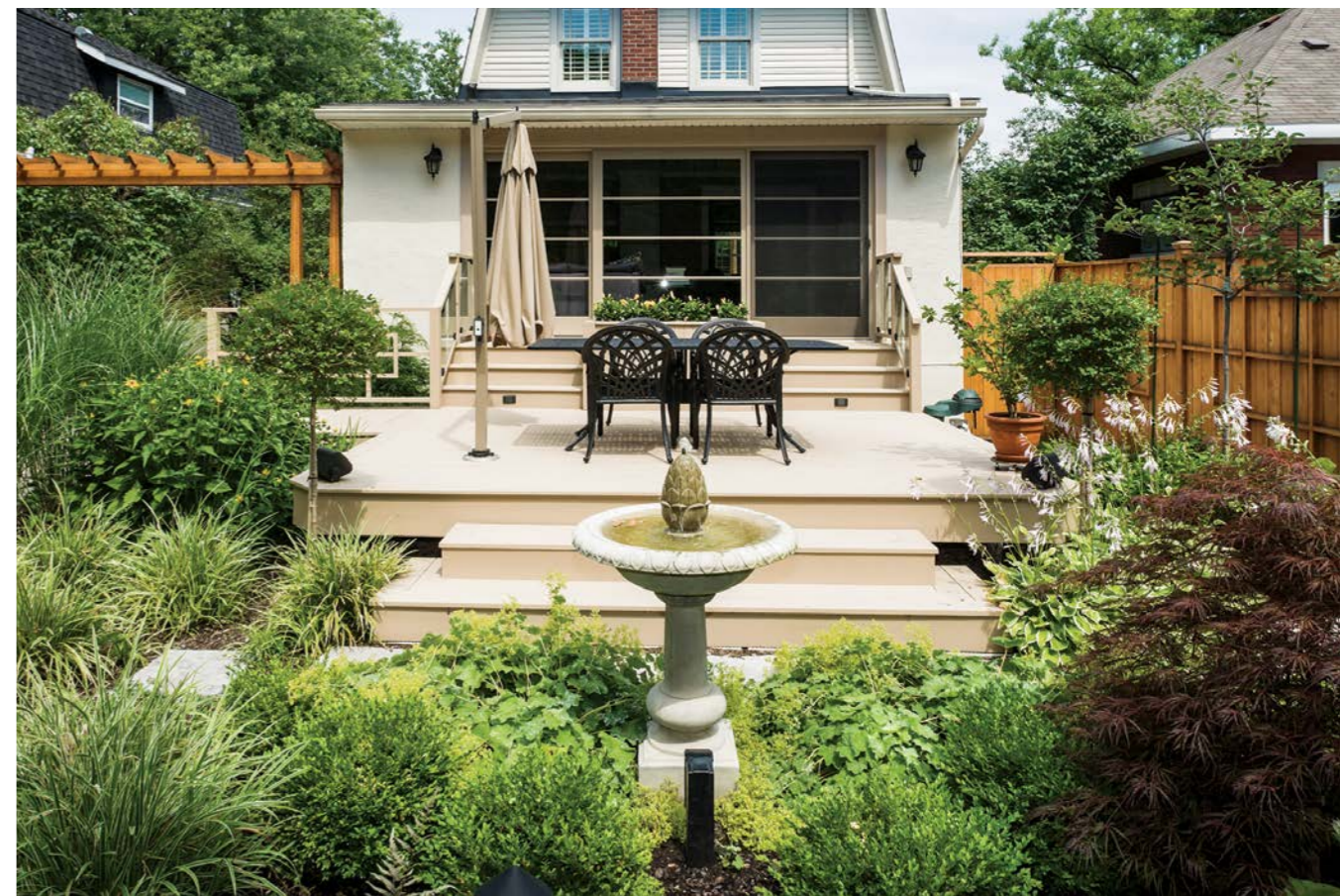
Most of us long to turn our backyard into a place where family and friends love to gather, whether for dining out under the stars or sitting around the firepit making s'mores and conversation. All you need is a level area—paved or decked is best—that allows safe and effortless passage between house and landscape and extends the floor of your house outside. Easy access to your kitchen always helps.

▼ **ADD YOUR PERSONALITY TO SMALL SPACES.** In this urban courtyard corner, a sweet seating area is nestled under the umbrella of a white birch. The high walls provide privacy as well as a clinging surface for lush greenery, which adds to the romance.



GATHERING SPACES REQUIRE THE RIGHT FURNITURE. Inviting chairs set around a firepit on this clean-lined terrace are an extension of the indoor living room.

SMALL SPACES CAN MAKE A BIG IMPACT. In one tiny space, this urban backyard has it all: close proximity to the kitchen, privacy from neighbors, and a beautiful focal point that draws the eye toward the middle of lush gardens.



Julie Moir Messervy is the author of Home Outside: Creating the Landscape You Love and Outside the Not So Big House with Sarah Susanka.



Just the right amount of color

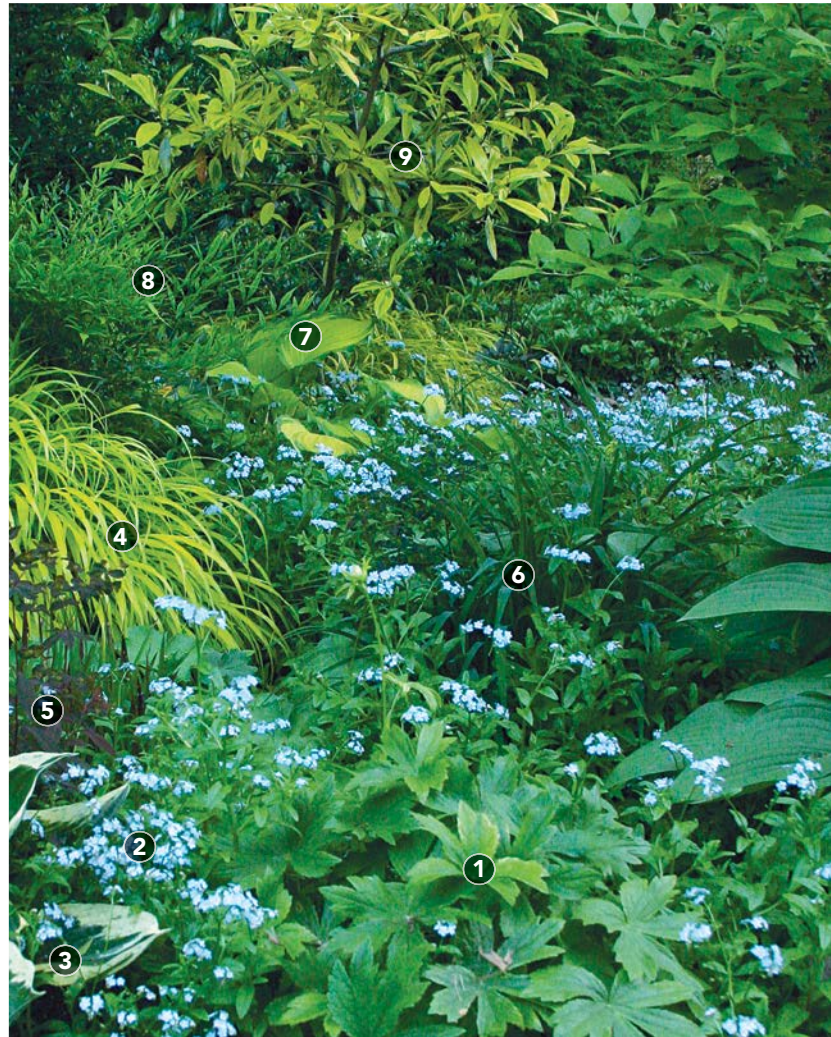
This combination manages to be bright and cheery, rather than gaudy, by not overdoing the colors.

1. **'Ann Folkard' hardy geranium** (*Geranium 'Ann Folkard'*, USDA Hardiness Zones 5–9)
2. **Golden Japanese barberry** (*Berberis thunbergii** 'Aurea', Z 5–8)
3. **Campanula** (*Campanula poscharskyana*, Z 3–9)
4. **Feather grass** (*Stipa tenuissima*, Z 7–11)
5. **'Stella de Oro' daylily** (*Hemerocallis 'Stella de Oro'*, Z 3–10)

CONDITIONS: Full sun to partial shade; moist, well-drained soil

—Designed by the staff of the Bellevue Botanical Garden in Bellevue, Washington

*These plants are considered invasive in some areas. Please visit invasiveplantatlas.org for more information.



Low light doesn't mean low interest

Even when the blue flowers of forget-me-not fade, this shade planting will keep its interest through the unity and diversity of chartreuse foliage, a variety of hostas, and distinct forms.

1. **Masterwort** (*Astrantia major*, Zones 4–8)
2. **Water forget-me-not** (*Myosotis scorpioides**, Z 5–9)
3. **'Independence' hosta** (*Hosta 'Independence'*, Z 3–9)
4. **'All Gold' Japanese forest grass** (*Hakonechloa macra* 'All Gold', Z 5–9)
5. **Purple wood spurge** (*Euphorbia amygdaloides* 'Purpurea', Z 6–9)
6. **'Pardon Me' daylily** (*Hemerocallis 'Pardon Me'*, Z 3–10)
7. **'Lady Guinevere' hosta** (*Hosta 'Lady Guinevere'*, Z 3–9)
8. **Yellow-fruited heavenly bamboo** (*Nandina domestica** var. *leucocarpa*, Z 6–11)
9. **'Mattie Mae Smith' sweet bay magnolia** (*Magnolia virginiana* 'Mattie Mae Smith', Z 6–9)

CONDITIONS: Partial to full shade; rich, moist soil

—Designed by Eve Thyrum for her garden in Wilmington, Delaware