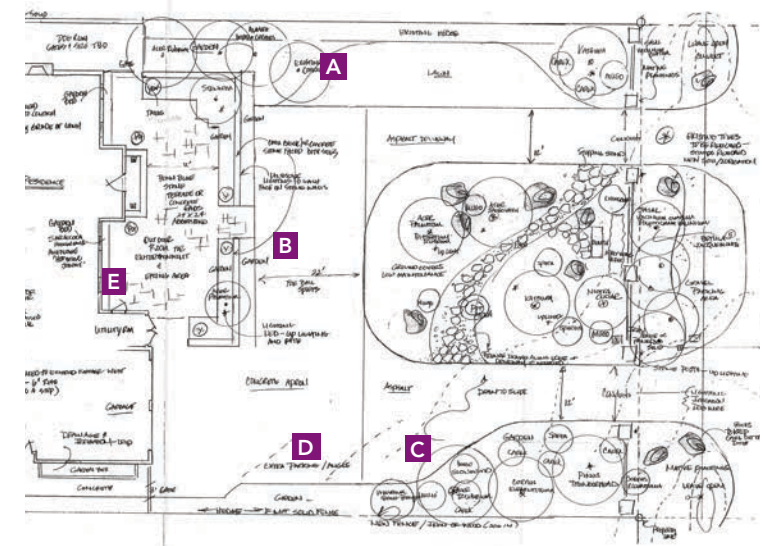


SO LONG LAWN

This low care front garden proves you don't need turf to make a good first impression.

BY STACIE CROOKS

A quiet spot to sip morning coffee feels set apart from the rest of the world. In reality, this bench is just steps away from the house and driveway, but carefully planned screening elements lend it a luxurious sense of enclosure.



| THE PLAN |

A playful, water-wise retreat

A bland landscape is transformed with layers of colorful, carefree plants and functional open spaces.

CONDITIONS: Zone 8 coastal Washington; full sun, well-drained soil generously amended with organic matter, western exposure

CHALLENGES: Optimizing circulation areas, minimizing maintenance

CARE: Garden beds are irrigated on an as-needed basis; new plants are watered a bit more during their first summer to help them get established. Annual maintenance includes some spring cleanup and a cutback of perennials and grasses in fall.

- A. Bluestone terrace enclosing the home's main entrance**
- B. Concrete parking area and sports court**
- C. Garden bed with foot paths and private seating area**
- D. Perimeter plantings and privacy hedge**
- E. Asphalt driveway**

Is there a gardener anywhere who wouldn't appreciate a beautiful space designed specifically to keep maintenance requirements realistic and manageable? I recently designed such a landscape for a client who wanted to replace her front lawn with a garden where her family of six could play, socialize, and gather with their large circle of relatives and friends. The goal was to strike a balance between beauty and ease of care, since the homeowner wanted to maintain the space without hiring outside help. The design we came up with is an excellent example of a hard-working landscape that looks great but does not require hours of labor or a crew of landscapers to keep it that way. As a bonus, the new garden requires about half the water that the turf grass did.

Remove the lawn, but keep it family friendly
The key to creating a low-maintenance yet visually appealing

garden lies in careful planning and thoughtful design choices. In this case it was important to create spaces that are easily navigated by people of all ages, with areas to gather as a group and a few hidden sanctuaries where individual family members can retreat to rejuvenate from their busy lives.

The head of the turn-around driveway was widened to accommodate the width of a game court (facing page, bottom left photo). Although it is shy of any regulation sizes, the space is large enough to play some competitive pickleball, and when the net is stashed away the area doubles as parking. We also created a sizable terrace off from the home's main entrance that is used for family meals, entertaining, and as a spectator area for regular evening racquet games (facing page, bottom right photo).

Inside the loop of the turn-around driveway, the existing lawn was replaced with a resilient mix of plants that provide a stun-



The head of the driveway doubles as a recreational space. A pickleball net (above) can be quickly set up for an evening match, and onlookers have ample space to relax on the adjacent terrace (right). Dynamic mixed plantings in the middle of the driveway loop (top) add life to the landscape and prevent the paved areas from dominating the design.





A seasonal veil filters views from the house into the front garden. The fountainlike form of giant feather grass is an engaging focal point over a long season, echoing the upswept branches and airy foliage of nearby trees. Sweeps of smaller plants fill out the design, creating patterns and color echoes that resonate across the composition.



An inviting color palette plays across an eye-catching mix of textures. Rich, dusky reds and sunny yellows serve as visual counterpoints to the dark blue-grey of the home's exterior, while a soothing mix of silvers, blues, and purples (facing page) blends the edges between the hardscaping and garden bed.

ning array of textures, colors and forms in every season. Subtle grade changes and strategically placed boulders anchor the garden and give it a more natural look. A winding path invites exploration and leads to a secluded seating area perfect for relaxing away from the crowd (photo p. 01-02).

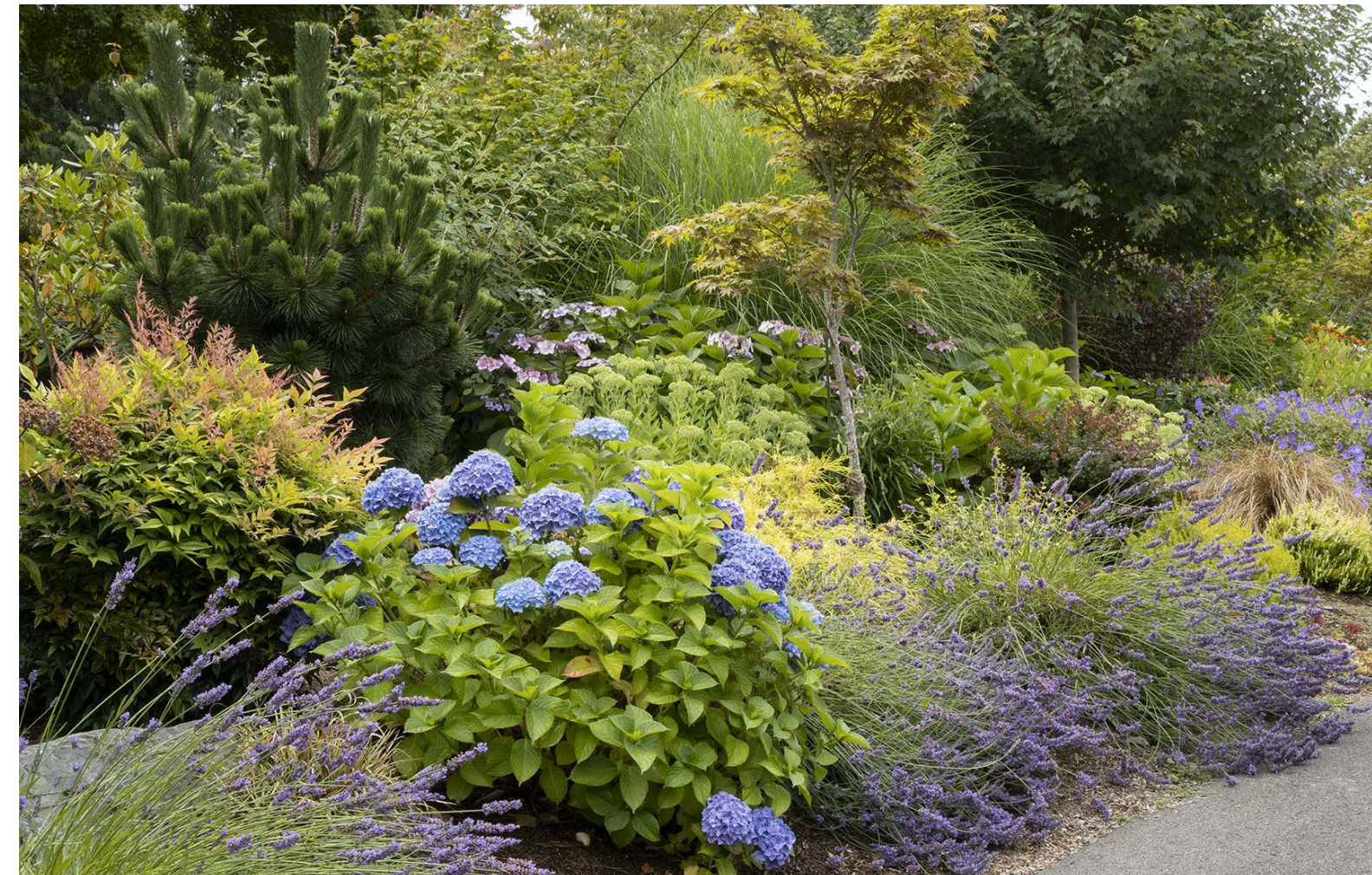
For the garden beds, we focused on selecting plant varieties that are well-suited to the local climate and soil conditions. We included many native plants that are tough, resistant to pests and diseases, and well-suited to the available sunlight and water resources of the site. We mixed in plants native to regions with similar growing conditions to our area of the Pacific Northwest, which is often described as having a Mediterranean climate.

Winding through the garden are wide paths with large, level stones to walk on. A tight, low-growing ground cover fills in between and around the stones. Brass buttons (*Leptinella potentillina*, Zones 4–10, photo p. 03 foreground) is perfect for this purpose as it is drought-resistant and creates a perfect carpet for walking on. Adding a few large boulders within the garden ties it in with the natural Pacific Northwest landscape. Some of the boulders create berms that enhance the topography and make the garden seem larger and more interesting.

Screening and a coordinated color theme create the sense of a personal retreat

The homeowner requested an area that was set apart from the house and the rest of the garden, a hidden get-a-way for contemplation and relaxation. Using plants that work as screens was a natural solution for making the space feel visually separate, but not completely hidden from other areas of the garden.

Photo:



Plants cascade over the edges of the parking area and driveway, softening the hard lines so that the eye will pause on plant compositions instead of the hardscape.

There are many plants that can be used to create a subtle veil of privacy. My favorite go-to evergreen for this purpose is giant feather grass (*Stipa gigantea*, Zones 7–10). Other plants that work well are tall verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*, Zones 7–9), meadow rue (*Thalictrum rochebrunianum* Zones 3–8), and tall ornamental grasses of all kinds.

We also wanted this garden to serve as a colorful foil for the dark blue house (facing page, top photo), which we did by incorporating plants with blue and purple blooms and complementary yellow and orange hues. We chose plants that would stagger their bloom times to create a constant show of color from early spring through late fall.

Hard edges are softened with plants

Plants cascade over the edges of the parking area and driveway, softening the hard lines so that the eye will pause on plant compositions instead of the hardscape. Adding silver and gray colored plants along this driveway border helped to blend the edges nicely.

Drought tolerant plants that work well for this purpose are lavender varieties like 'Hidcote' and 'Munsted' (*Lavandula angustifolia* cvs., Zones 4–10) and 'Silver Knight' heather (*Calluna vulgaris* 'Silver Knight', Zones 5–8). For a long season of continuous color, from June through October, Rozanne geranium (*Geranium* 'Gerwat', Zones 5–8) is a stunner, with its reddish purple flowers and mounding deep green foliage slightly marbled with chartreuse tips.

This garden is a testament to the idea that resilience and natural beauty can be achieved without the burdensome weight of constant maintenance. As it flourishes, it also contributes to the delicate balance of the surrounding ecosystem, using about half the water needed to maintain a lawn. Consuming fewer resources is always the way to go.

Stacie Crooks is a Seattle-based garden designer and educator who has created gardens throughout the Pacific Northwest.



| DESIGN IDEAS |

A water-wise landscape doesn't need to look like a desert

Monotonous, high-maintenance turf grass was removed from this front yard to make way for a bounty of trees, shrubs, and perennials. The plants look lush, but require relatively little care and much less water than the lawn. Here are some of the other key details that make this design work.

- 1. A FOOTPATH INVITES EXPLORATION.** In addition to providing easy access for seasonal tasks, the pathway allows a visitor to immerse themselves in the garden.
- 2. GROUND COVERS FLOW AROUND STEPPING STONES.**

Bringing a ground-hugging layer right up to the edge of the footpath adds a touch of softness and naturalistic charm.

- 3. TRANSLUCENT LAYERS SCREEN THE SEATING AREA.** Tall grasses and small trees gently enclose the center of the bed



without completely blocking views to the rest of the garden.

- 4. A DESTINATION BECKONS.** A comfortable bench set off to the side of the path has become a favorite escape for the busy mother who maintains this garden.
- 5. DENSER LAYERS PROVIDE PRIVACY.** Strategically placed evergreen hedging is an attractive backdrop for the seating area, and blocks views into the garden from the nearby street.
- 6. COLOR IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT.** A coordinated pal-

ette ties the space together, with an emphasis on warm, cheerful hues grounded by sultry reds, deep burgundies, and tawny tans.

- 7. LIGHTING KEEPS THE GARDEN ACCESSIBLE AT NIGHT.** Along the pathway, unobtrusive fixtures cast light downwards to guide the way without excessive light pollution.
- 8. BOULDERS ANCHOR THE COMPOSITION.** Nestled in the landscape, large rocks give this garden a sense of place, tying it to the nearby mountains of the Pacific Northwest.