

HAVEN

THE TRIBUNE
SPRING 2008



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picture perfect garden

The landscaping at this Arroyo Grande home grows more interesting and colorful each year. The owners tell us how they did it

Written by Bob Brownson

Photographed by Linda Brownson



AFTER:
PLANTS IN VARYING HEIGHTS and brilliant colors take the garden to a new dimension.

BEFORE:
THE OLD FRONT GARDEN was relatively flat with a small patch of grass and a border of gazanias that soon grew woody.



FERNS STAND TALL in the background, and a strawberry tree with clusters of small white flowers and edible fruit grows at left. At the center is elks blue grass, with Cape rush over six feet tall at right.

Our new Arroyo Grande home came with three special outdoor features: a large backyard deck, a small front garden with a grass lawn ... and mud.

Tons of mud. It was the winter of 1998, an El Niño year, and torrential rains encouraged us to plant our backyard right away to avoid a runoff down the steep slopes adjacent to our home.

It was our good fortune to discover local landscape architect Michael Barry, whose love of wild grasses and native plants was just the change we wanted from our previous gardens in Southern California.

Because our long redwood deck took up so much backyard space, Barry had only a small canvas to work with, yet he crafted an ingenious plan, including a pathway garden that meanders from one end of the deck to the other with a variety of tall shrubs for shade and privacy. He also included seasonal surprises.

The pathway garden is lined with Barry's signature tall grasses and lamb's ear, plus engaging color from yellow yarrow, pink penstemon, Santa Barbara daisies, blue catmint and stalks of bright purple Mexican sage showing off at either end. Other features include a palette of bamboo and towering Australian tea branches in bright white and pink.

Seasonal surprises include a weeping African sumac bush that bursts with zillions of tiny white summer blossoms (touring birds love to pick at them). And, twice a year, Oregon grape hedges, their prickly branches resembling ivy, sport crowns of brilliant gold.

After a few years, we found we were in a losing

battle elsewhere so we surrendered to the gophers who enjoyed our front yard flower and grass buffet. Our groundcover had turned woody as well so we decided to create an all-new front garden.

We turned to Ron Carlock of Ron's Nursery in Grover Beach, who had helped us through various gardening dilemmas. We asked him to transform our front yard from a small, flat garden to one that would appear much larger with vibrant colors and shrubs growing skyward in a variety of heights. We wanted striking accent plants that would add character to the garden ... and more seasonal surprises.

Everything was planted in wire mesh baskets to ward off the gophers, and it worked.

Front garden highlights include rows of English and French lavender; variegated hebe plants with deep purple pompoms; pink guara thriving under a multi-trunk paper bark tree; apple blossom penstemon; tall yarrow in white, yellow and rust; purple sprigs of Mexican sage ... plus a fern grove and Cape rush grass six feet tall. Emerald carpet manzanita and redwood chips serve as groundcover in place of grass.

For more seasonal treats, eugenia Monterey Bay shrubs have greenish-brown leaves and surprise us with tiny, edible red berries and cottonlike blossoms during fall and winter. Three strawberry trees have dark green, red-stemmed leaves and amaze us in late summer with edible berries that turn from gold to brilliant red.

What's next in our garden landscape? No doubt, more surprises.





CLOCKWISE FROM LOWER LEFT: RUST-COLORED YARROW, stems of lavender and Swan River daisies. Native to New Zealand, the variegated hebe shrub has white-tipped leaves and violet flower spikes. Brilliant yellow yarrow dots the garden, adding tall color accents. A potato plant vine shows off its bright white flowers with contrasting yellow stamens. Close-up of pink flowers from a bed of verbena.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A redwood deck features patio furnishings in a teal color. Brilliant blue ceramic pots create a striking contrast to the redwood deck, especially when planted with pink mandevilla and bright Meyer lemons. Succulents in complementary colors grow in a single pot.



BUCKET & BENCH is decorated with autumn grape leaves, top, while a reproduction of Donatello's 'Head of a Woman' shares a wrought iron bench with a pot of succulents.

Resources

Michael Barry, landscape designer
Los Osos
528-1181

Native Sons Wholesale Nursery
Arroyo Grande
481-5996

Ron's Nursery
Ron Carlock, owner
Grover Beach
489-4747

Silver Fox Landscape Construction
Randy Graber, owner
Arroyo Grande
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