

For a natural touch, landscape designer Michael Barry added a stream, waterfall and koi pond to a 1-acre property on the outskirts of San Luis Obispo.



a sanctuary of discovery

Local landscape designer Michael Barry helped a young couple create a haven for relaxation and exploration

Written by Dawn Rapp
Photographed by David Middlecamp

When a young couple bought property just outside of San Luis Obispo, they acquired an acre of land but little else. The flat backyard was covered with weeds and brush and a few scattered pine trees. Yet the couple wanted a sanctuary — no views of their neighbors and plenty of space for their small children to wander. They also wanted a natural-looking yard that would be drought tolerant, low-maintenance and able to withstand the family's two playful golden retrievers.

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Backyard escape: Michael Barry designed a yard where the owners would never get bored. Above, one of the paths that winds through the property.

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The pair contacted landscape designer Michael Barry of Los Osos, asking him to help them create a backyard haven. Rising to the challenge, Barry took the open space and created depth, multiple levels and numerous sections for the children to play, hide and explore in.

Rather than follow traditional styles of landscape design, Barry built a yard where the family would never become bored. He compares the design of the yard to what a hiker would find in the wilderness: multiple paths, a variety of trees, cool colors and changing scenery.

"I try to create something that people want to go out in," Barry said. "The weather is so nice around here that you want to use your yard as another room."

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Dry but not barren: Drought-resistant and low-maintenance ornamental grasses and California poppies cover parts of the yard.

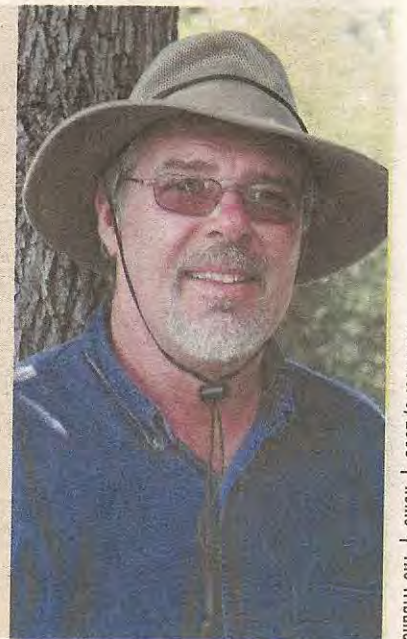


Visual distinction: Above, trees create a natural barrier that blocks views of neighboring structures and creates more privacy for the property. The trees will continue to grow and provide more privacy. Below, the same view before the new trees and grasses were planted.



TIPS FOR CREATING YOUR IDEAL LANDSCAPE DESIGN FROM MICHAEL BARRY

- **Consider views, privacy issues and color choices for your garden.** Being able to enjoy distant views amongst cool colors promotes relaxation.
- **Use plants that look different when the sunlight changes.** For example, some trees may have leaves that look silvery in the morning but green at high noon. This effect keeps a garden interesting.
- **Use drought-tolerant and native plants.** They're likely to thrive even in years of low rainfall.





master gardener
Lee Oliphant

lavenders blue ... and violet and mauve

Q. I'm confused about all the different lavenders available in my nursery. Which ones are best for the home garden?

— *Katrina Maksimuk,
San Luis Obispo*

A. Of all the drought-tolerant, deer-resistant, Mediterranean plants that thrive on the Central Coast, lavender (*Lavandula* spp.) is my favorite. Its blue, mauve, violet and purple blossoms attract bees and perfume the air.

Lavender has more than 30 species. Among them are many varieties and cultivars. They are considered dwarf woody shrubs. They're evergreen, perennial and belong to the same plant family as mints, sages and thymes.

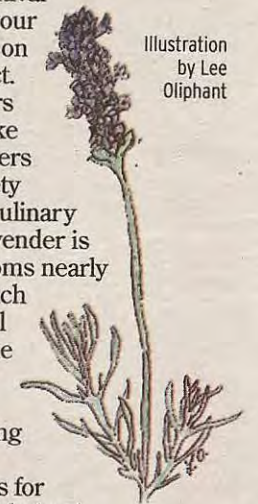
The most common species of lavender are English (*Lavandula angustifolia*), French (*L. dentate*), Spanish (*L. stoechas*) and hybrids called lavandins (*Lavandula intermedia*).

The lavender cultivar you choose for your garden depends on the desired effect. English lavenders bloom early, make pretty dried flowers and are the variety prized for their culinary uses. Spanish lavender is colorful and blooms nearly year-round. French lavenders do well in containers. The lavandin "Provence" is a favorite for making wands.

Ideal conditions for lavender are well-drained loamy soil and a dry, sunny location. Lavenders are susceptible to root-rot from overwatering, so plants should be kept moist only until established. Fertilize in the spring and prune back (about two-thirds of the new growth annually) to encourage thick, dense growth and lush blooms.

For more information, contact the SLO Master Gardeners at 781-5939 on Monday and Thursday from 1 to 5 p.m., in Arroyo Grande at 473-7190 on Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., or in Templeton at 434-4105 on Wednesday from 9 a.m. to noon. Visit the Master Gardeners' Web site at <http://groups.ucanr.org/slomg/> or e-mail mgsanluisobispo@ucdavis.edu.

Illustration
by Lee
Oliphant



Home-grown produce: The property includes a garden where the owners plant a variety of vegetables, including strawberries, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, corn and lettuce.

Garden

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Many paths wind around the outskirts of the yard. There are wide trails, but there are also smaller ones meant for children, some leading to a redwood tree house that's often a hiding place or fort.

To encourage the growth of several small oak trees on the property, Barry adjusted the landscaping. Oaks grow quickly if they're in the right location with the correct irrigation, he said, and the trees now look big for their age. The trees will create more privacy as they grow taller and wider.

Grass was planted for a children's play area, and directly behind the lawn a native meadow of ornamental grasses thrives with limited care. The ornamental grasses need to be mowed only twice a year and serve as good protection against weeds.

A south-facing side yard, which gets the most sunlight, is where the family spends most of its time. There's a large, manmade stream, waterfall and koi pond, as well as an extensive vegetable garden that includes strawberries, toma-



A splash of color: Colorful zinnias enliven the side of a path. Many of the flowers on the property were grown from seed in the family's miniature greenhouse.

atoes, eggplant, peppers, corn and lettuce. Nearby, a colorful flower garden is filled with zinnias, salvias and sunflowers, most of them started from seed in the family's miniature greenhouse.

The landscape, only four years old, looks years beyond its age. While extensive, it is low-maintenance enough to give the family plenty of time to spend simply enjoying the outdoors.