

A Family GARDEN

Looking from the end of the garden toward the driveway, the terrace garden forms a tapestry of greens, punctuated by purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) and maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*). Blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*) and Woodward globe arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Woodwardii') add round shapes. Trellises mark the entrance to the auto court and serve as a partial screen. Two ornamental urns hold annuals.



Entering the patio from the kitchen I viewed this elegant and serene space. The dappled light on the lawn and patio added to the atmosphere. Purple smokebush (*Cotinus coggygria*), 'Center Glow' ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Center Glow') and 'Rosy Rocket' barberry (*Berberis thunbergii atropurpurea* 'Rosy Rocket') bring a deep purple tone to garden and work beautifully with the pink blooming plants. Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*) and a low-growing juniper (*Juniperus* spp.) add blue accents to the garden.

I discovered this garden on my way to an appointment, when I made a wrong turn up a long driveway. As I got out of my car, a gracious woman informed me that I had the wrong location. I had just enough time to catch a glimpse of a lovely, colorful garden. I apologized, and added that I am a landscape designer and garden writer and asked if the homeowner would consider letting me photograph it in the future. She took my card, told me she had done the landscaping herself, and offered to back my car down her narrow driveway, for which I was very thankful. I learned later that this was the garden of Joshua and Martha Mullin.

The 1925 McKay-built, Cedar Rapids home sits on a hill in a neighborhood of older houses. The Mullins moved in five years ago and found an aging landscape ready for renovation. Martha, an experienced gardener who continues to learn as much as she can about plants and materials, set to work. With two young children and a dog, the couple has concentrated on creating a delightful back yard for the family to enjoy. They added to the existing fence to create a truly secure and private garden.



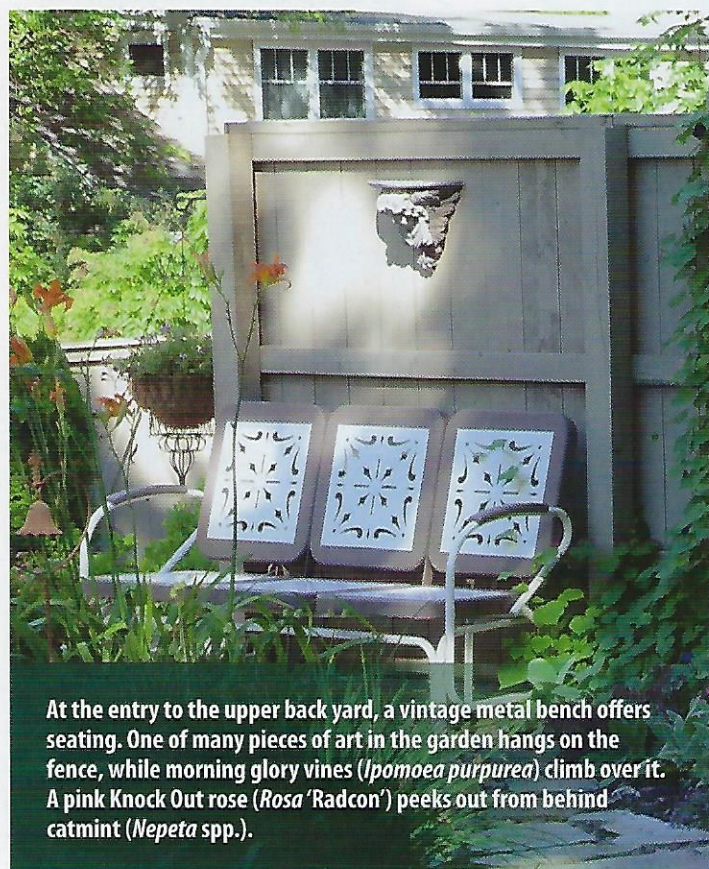
Timeless limestone steps lead from the bluestone patio up to the pool and back yard. Slender Emerald Green arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Smaragd') are used throughout the garden to either screen the fence and outside world or views within the garden. Here, the plant partially obscures the back yard and keeps our eyes on the terraces while two reddish purple 'Center Glow' ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Center Glow') reflect the color of the Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) in the background, drawing us up the steps.



Groupings of plants including catmint (*Nepeta* spp.), maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*), daylilies (*Hemerocallis* spp.), a pink Knock Out rose (*Rosa* 'Radcon'), annuals and spirea (*Spiraea* spp.) frame the entry to the back yard. The borrowed view of rooftops serves as a backdrop to the play lawn and helps to visually enclose this lush green space.



In this view from the back of the lawn toward the house, the grandeur of the setting becomes clear. A Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) spreads its branches over the pool fence and the play lawn. The reddish purple leaves bring out a faint pinkish tone in the beige-colored house. On the left, we see a corner of the garage and the open gate between the auto court and driveway. Variegated hosta (*Hosta* spp.) leaves add brightness in the shade.



At the entry to the upper back yard, a vintage metal bench offers seating. One of many pieces of art in the garden hangs on the fence, while morning glory vines (*Ipomoea purpurea*) climb over it. A pink Knock Out rose (*Rosa 'Radcon'*) peeks out from behind catmint (*Nepeta* spp.).

Private Patio

An existing swimming pool behind and above the house could have been seen as a problem, but Martha designed a private patio, accessed from the kitchen to fill the area between the house and the pool. She removed a failing, curved wall and replaced it with formal terraces of Iowa limestone. The couple salvaged existing limestone to rebuild generous steps leading up to the pool and the backyard. A large table seats them all, plus guests, and stands on a Pennsylvania bluestone surface. Martha planted the garden with a combination of shrubs and perennials, with repeating leaf and bloom colors throughout the spring, summer and fall. Martha keeps the shrubs pruned for fresh, dense growth.

Timeless Features

A small fountain, urns and other garden art pieces add to the sense of timelessness, created by the aging stone, the large brick house and plants, such as roses and morning glories. A lawn ramp leads from the driveway up to the play yard, where a wooden play structure and a trampoline keep the children busy when they are not in the pool. A small vegetable garden offers tomatoes and basil for family dinners.

I photographed the garden at the end of July, so missed Martha Mullin's lilies, but found plenty of bloom and leaf color throughout the landscape. 🌸

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A pretty umbrella the color of the house and fence provides shade on the pool deck. Vines on the pool fence and pots of annuals soften the hard aspects of the pool and connect it to the garden. Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) and blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*) fill the upper corner of the terrace.



A small, raised-bed vegetable garden is nestled behind a grouping of spirea (*Spiraea* spp.). This small garden connects the patio area with the garage. Access to the raised bed is from the lawn.



In this photo, the connections among the patio, back yard, auto court and garage are clear. All of these areas are brought together thoughtfully. The arching leaves of the maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) mimic the flared shape of the top of the urns and contrasts with the severe shapes of the Emerald Green arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Smaragd') and the topiary juniper (*Juniperus* spp.).



The garage is a form of art itself and serves as a backdrop for another small garden of Autumn Joy sedum (*Hylotelephium* 'Herbstfreude'), hosta (*Hosta* spp.), 'Rosy Rocket' barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* atropurpurea 'Rosy Rocket') and lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*). The homeowners built a grassy ramp between two limestone walls to create access to the backyard.