



Creating an Island Bed

ABOVE: In summer, drumstick allium (*A. sphaerocephalon*), daylilies, balloon flower, yarrow, sedum (not yet in bloom) and 'David', a white garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata* 'David'), grow harmoniously together, each with their distinctive leaf and flower shapes. The phlox connects with white chairs in the lawn.

Sitting in my living room and looking out into the front yard, there was nothing to see except the road and our windbreak. I had developed a border bed to the side of the house, but there are no windows on that side, so we could not see it from the house. I thought it would be nice to have a garden that people driving by would see.

The challenge of planting an island bed is that it will be an island in a sea

of grass with no relation to the rest of the yard. Often, these beds end up with arbitrary shapes such as the kidney. I designed the bed around two existing ornamental trees. Both eventually died, but the original idea was successful. Different trees serve that purpose now. I sited the garden in front of three white pines (*Pinus strobus*). As the garden matured, the space filled in with plants.

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ABOVE: A path leads through the garden toward the road. In spring, *Allium*, *Salvia*, columbine (*Aquilegia* spp.), a Double Knock Out rose (*Rosa* 'Radtko') and blue star are in flower. On the left, meadow rue is about to bloom as it reaches upward. Stepping-stones take us between 'Green Mountain' boxwood. The gray-green of lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*) and the green tones of the other foliage create a soothing experience.

In summer, globe thistle (*Echinops ritro*) reflects the blue ceramic orb across the yard. In spring balls of *Allium giganteum* have the same effect. The blue flowers of Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) and orange daylilies also connect the gardens.





Color and Form

Over time, I added shrubs to give the garden more interesting forms with varying shapes, heights and shades of green. I added garden art and a path for access and to draw people into the garden. Perennials and bulbs came and went giving me the opportunity to experiment and grow new plants. As the trees in the yard grew, the bed changed from full sun to having areas of partial sun and even some shade, creating opportunities to diversify the garden.

A royal star magnolia (*Magnolia stellata* 'Royal Star') anchors the bed on the end nearest the house. Now mature, it obscures part of the garden, lending a bit of mystery to the scene. On the other end I now have a dwarf spruce (*Picea* spp).

A large round blue ball mounted on an upturned pot reflects the blue, purple and white shape of alliums, bulbs I have planted around the yard. In this way, an island bed can be connected to the greater landscape without actually touching other beds. Repeating colors of plants and even

ABOVE: A star magnolia and a dwarf upright spruce anchor the bed. 'Green Mountain' boxwoods lead down the path to the front yard. Perennials spanning three seasons fill out the composition.

BELOW: Over time, plants have filled in the area in front of the pine trees, which have grown large since the garden was first planned. *Sedum rupestre* 'Angelina' surrounds a dwarf pine. BOTTOM: The garden continues to intrigue, even in the winter. The structure created by the trees and shrubs is clear. Brown and dark green tones connect with the brick and trim on the house, and the boxwoods and yews along the front walk. The mounds of snow remind us of the billows of perennials in the spring, summer and fall.





ABOVE: Looking back toward the house later in spring, 'Blue and Gold' spiderwort in the foreground borders the path, while allium, blue star and salvia continue the blue theme. **LEFT:** In early summer, meadow rue blooms yellow and sways in the breeze above yarrow, balloon flower and 'Goldsturm' black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), which is just beginning to bloom. Autumn Joy sedum (*Hylotelephium 'Herbstfreude'*) in the foreground is still green. 'Karl Foerster' feather reed-grass catches the wind.

the same plants throughout the yard will accomplish the same result.

Plant Diversity

Three boxwoods (*Buxus* 'Green Mountain') march along the path. 'Karl Foerster' feather reed-grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster') punctuates the center of the bed. The yellow theme of my yard continues in this garden with an early yellow Siberian iris (*I. sibirica*) and daffodils (*Narcissus* spp.), spiderwort (*Tradescantia* 'Blue and Gold'), daylilies

(*Hemerocallis* cvs.), yarrow (*Achillea* spp.) and black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm'). A less-common plant, meadow rue (*Thalictrum flavum* ssp. *glaucum*), weaves its way through the garden. I deliberately intermingled plants of varying heights.

I used a lot of blues, also. A bearded iris (*I. germanica*) I inherited from the farm family who built the house has brilliant color. I love the tall balloon flower (*Platycodon grandiflorus* 'Mariesii'), which

blooms continuously in the summer. Blue star (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*) blooms in spring and Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) follows it, blooming until frost. Blue Siberian iris appears in late spring.

I began this garden dreaming of my favorite colors, but it surprised me by enhancing the hues with ornamental trees, shrubs and garden art. 🌿

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