



# My FAVORITE PLACE *on Earth*

The Smith Lake garden of Peggy Hill

△ A few years ago the front entry garden was covered in grass that didn't want to grow, and tons of weeds that did. This is so much nicer and a LOT more fun. The spectacular white plant in the middle is caladium 'White Christmas'.

This view of the entry garden showcases the lacy silver foliage of *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle', the developing pink buds of sedum 'Autumn Fire', and the white blooms of phlox 'David'. The red cuphea at the bottom of the picture bloomed nonstop all summer.▷



My favorite place on earth is my garden. When I first saw the wooded lot over 20 years ago, I was struck by its natural beauty. Over the years I have carefully shaped it while trying to respect what was original to the site. It has been an extremely rewarding experience and a wonderful journey. Tending my garden connects me to the earth in a very personal way. My landscape became my garden in the same way the Velveteen Rabbit became real.

The 7-acre lot on Smith Lake has a striking rock shoreline and gently falling creek. There are many wildflowers such as the crane fly orchid I discovered this January, the narrow-leaf liatris that shines in the summer and the lobelia that blooms down by the creek. Other native plants are oakleaf hydrangeas, azaleas, witch hazel, deciduous magnolias and many mountain laurels.



The first area I planted was the front yard garden, and it's still my favorite. It has been redesigned many times. The first year I had no idea what to do, and planted the whole thing with sunflower seeds. The next year I put in pink azaleas. When I changed my mind about pink in the front garden, I planted 'Carissa' hollies, but then I decided the shrubs should be more vertical than mushroom shaped. I moved the practically full-grown hollies at the end of a long week of gardening and spent the next month making frequent trips to my chiropractor. It was then I decided to learn more about garden design. I read lots of books and took courses at Auburn to become a landscape consultant with the American Garden Society. The gardenias I use now are perfect, and the fragrance is intoxicating.

I planned my garden as distinct smaller spaces. They are tied together with similar

△ The pond was a Mother's Day gift. It just doesn't get any better than sitting on the front porch on a warm summer evening, enjoying the garden by the light of the tiki torches, and listening to its melody.

A favorite color combination is purple, red and chartreuse. The tall Mexican petunia (*Ruellia*) and *Plectranthus* 'Mona Lavender' supply the purple. Red is provided by pentas, impatiens and million bells (*Calibrachoa*). Winding the sweet potato vine 'Margarita' through each bed is like putting the cherry on top.▽



## GARDEN PROFILE

From the front porch, there is not a blade of grass in sight. The area under the large native dogwood is planted in hosta, coleus, caladium and ajuga. The red hibiscus and white phlox thrive in a sunnier area.

**The top ten things my garden has taught me:**

10. It's nice to share.
9. You have very limited control.
8. It's OK to change your mind.
7. Propagating is fun.
6. Hard work usually pays off.
5. My garden makes me happy.
4. You better stay in shape over winter so you can work hard in spring.
3. The more you know, the better it will grow.
2. You can always start over.

**And the number one thing my garden has taught me –**

1. Roll with the punches. Not everything is going to work out. Enjoy the pretty zinnias and forget about the fabulous plant that darned armadillo dug up.



plants, combinations and the use of the same native stone throughout. There's the grassless front entry garden, the backyard border garden, the garage potted garden, the fire pit garden, the raised bed vegetable garden, the woodland garden, the future water garden and the garden surrounding the fabulous patio area I named (to the embarrassment of my children) the Starlight Lounge.

I care for the birds, lizards and bees that visit my garden by using mostly organic methods. I have both the plants caterpillars feed on, and those with nectar for the butterflies. Although it is difficult, I put up with some caterpillar damage to my coral bells, parsley and fennel because I enjoy the butterflies so much. Native plants feed native wildlife, and it's easy for me to use native plants – I simply don't kill the ones that were here when I moved in.

Last spring, I completed a large expansion to the border garden. To save money I started some perennials from seed, and others I started from cuttings. If I had known that I would be taking pictures for this magazine, I might have

sprung for quart-sized plants, but then again maybe not. I enjoy seeing a plant grow from its very beginning. Once, I was explaining to my daughter and her friend how spectacularly fabulous my newly planted babies were. These particular babies resembled twigs with one or two small leaves. The friend gave her a quizzical look so she explained my excitement. "Mom doesn't see it the way it looks now. She imagines it fully grown."

It's so much fun for me to see my garden evolve over time. I'll always have a list of plants I need to move around and new plants I must try. My garden will never be finished, but in between redesigning my garden, working in my garden, reading about gardening or writing about gardening, you can find me just sitting in my garden in complete contentment. 🍃

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△ In the fall, the large pampas grass is the star of the sunny border garden. By this time of year, the orange and yellow narrow-leaf zinnias, yellow lantana, red salvia and purple butterfly bush have been performing tirelessly for months.