



# summer cottage living

A site lends itself to formal and informal outdoor rooms

**W**ith renovations of a Victorian Connecticut home almost completed, the owners looked to Hoffman Landscapes, Inc. to develop a garden that would look appropriate stylistically, satisfy their desire for formal and informal outdoor spaces and provide additional outdoor living area.

Although the confines of the site make it small, both narrow and long, the configuration of the house allowed the designer to build not one but three different gardens, each with distinct personality.

A front garden with a handsome sweep of lawn and a gazebo is framed by boxwood, liriope, Nikko blue hydrangea as well as arborvitae and leads to the second garden through a charming gate and leafy overhead canopy. The traditional wrought-iron fence that separates the house and property from the street definitely says, "keep off the grass" to those strolling by, yet it encourages views of the property through its fancy iron openings rather than a solid wall. There, nepeta entwined with fairy roses entices people walking by to stop and take a peek.

A formal and sunny side garden was positioned to align with a kitchen

## behind the scenes

**Landscape designer:** Hoffman Landscapes, Inc., Michael O. Hoffman, president, [www.hoffmanlandscapes.com](http://www.hoffmanlandscapes.com)

**Main plants used:** Dwarf Alberta spruce (*Picea glauca 'Conica'*), weeping Higan cherry (*Prunus subhirtella 'Pendula'*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), Chinese astilbe (*Astilbe cv.*), hosta (*Hosta*), daylily (*Hemerocallis*), English ivy (*Hedera helix*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia spp.*), liriope (*Liriope muscari*), boxwood (*Buxus spp.*), butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*), Nikko blue hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophyllus 'Nikko Blue'*), arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), fairy rose (*Rosa 'The Fairy' - polyantha*)

**Zones:** 4-8

**Challenge:** Very small site that's both narrow and long

**Favorite outcome:** Three distinctly different gardens on one small site



Faux brick cuts a swath to the little gate, framing a petite fountain along the way.

window and has a walkway framed with boxwood, four Albizia spruce and 10 arborvitae. The walk paved in a material that mimics brick but is much more indestructible come winter since it doesn't crack, leads around a fountain planted with blue-mist spruce and fairy roses. A rear entertainment garden is more informal in design, which Hollman felt appropriate since it is shady and lends itself to casual plant materials such as Chinese astilbe and hosta. The urban location prevents invasion from deer so English ivy, black-eyed Susies, day lilies and cayenne creeper thrive. The area is large enough to accommodate a dining table and its stone walls act as additional seating.

Hollman considers the best part of the garden to be its enchanting design. It's a tease for people who drive or stroll by. They tend to peer through the portal on the arbor and see what lies beyond.

## How pros direct a viewer's eye

The right materials and architectural elements can direct a viewer's eye toward a focal point and spark curiosity but also offer some degree of privacy.

### Curve beds toward a garden gate.

By filling beds with boxwood, limepegs and hydrangeas and angling them in a curve toward a garden gate, all attention is directed at what lies beyond.

## Keep the gate low and somewhat open.

Although it's meant to offer some privacy, the gate's slatted openings and soft green canopy above allow partial views and spur more interest.

### Arrange a higher green wall behind.

A row of arborvitae on either side of the gate offers additional screening, but the shrubs are clipped so that they, too, are a bit open at the top to encourage some additional peaks.



Low stone walls offer additional opportunities to lounge.

# new levels make the grade

Recycled stones enhance  
a Connecticut property



**A**fter completing a major renovation of their French Tudor home in Connecticut, the owners looked to blend the traditional landscape on the site with some more contemporary elements. The vision and goal of Hoffman Landscapes' design/build team was to play up the grade.

"I wanted to keep the big sugar maples and the tall older dogwoods," says Mike Hoffman. "So we shoehorned in the pool among the trees to make it part of the landscape."

To cope with the change in elevation, the company designed different terrace levels, with slightly different materials to distinguish them from one another, while making each more functional. The terrace closest to the house is used for entertaining and

paved in bluestone with light joints, since people would be wearing good shoes. A second terrace has part of its floor finished in the same bluestone but also with a circle of lawn, which links that terrace to the one below. Steps too are edged in lawn. An adjacent portion of the terrace is paved in irregularly shaped fieldstones flanking a connector to the third terrace level and the new natural pool and not yet Hoffman altered the look and feel by planting creeping thyme in between stones.

Because of the slope, part of the pool was constructed above ground with a negative edge, so it looks like water spills over its side. To enhance the pond effect, Hoffman used a dark finish to match the water to the color of the changing sky

Photography: Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.

Plants were selected to fashion a Connecticut country garden that deftly mixes informal and formal touches year-round: perennials in summer; orange-floral crocosmia to match the maple's full-blown glory in autumn; white blooms, lilies and rhododendrons in spring; and billowy ornamental grasses in winter.

When the owners had sold their home in Massachusetts, they carefully removed and brought with them a Japanese maple and some lacecap rhododendrons. Hoffman carefully replanted them here, demonstrating concern for the environment and delighting the homeowners.



## Reuse stones found at the site

Instead of discarding stones and boulders of all shapes and sizes found during excavations, the design/build team recycled them into low decorative walls, steps, visual accents, and a retaining wall, as well as a big focal point for the pool.

**Take existing stones apart by hand.** Here, they were carefully removed rather than tipped apart with a jackhammer.

stacked on pallets, wrapped with plastic so they wouldn't get scratched and stored away from the site until they were reused.

**Plant grass in between the stones.** To add to the informal natural look, grasses were planted to grow comfortably, which meant rocks were spaced about 5 to 6 inches apart.

## behind the scenes

**Landscape designer:**  
Hoffman Landscapes, Inc.  
Michael O. Hoffman, president,  
[www.hoffmanlandscapes.com](http://www.hoffmanlandscapes.com)

**Main plants used:** Dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*); giant aralia (*Aralia speciosa*); Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*); lacecap rhododendron (*Rhododendron luteum*); variegated sugar maple (*Acer saccharinum*); Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*); emerging thyme (*Thymus praecox*); T. serpyllum; lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*); astilbe

lamb's ear (*Stachys lanata*); Japanese spiraea (*Spiraea japonica*); variegated hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*); astilbe (*Astrorea*); Chinese evergreen (*Gaultheria shallon*); grass (*Muhlenbergia macroura*; *Arenaria*).

**Zones:** 4 & 5  
**Challenge:** Work with existing grade, recycle rocks, boulders and stones where possible and preserve existing trees.  
**Favorite outcome:** Recreated existing decks and rebuilt existing walls.