

a lot in a plot

Full of exotic details and quixotic plants in all shapes and sizes, a garden in Victoria, British Columbia, offers not only superb collections and brilliant combinations but also a tip of the hat to Dr. Seuss.

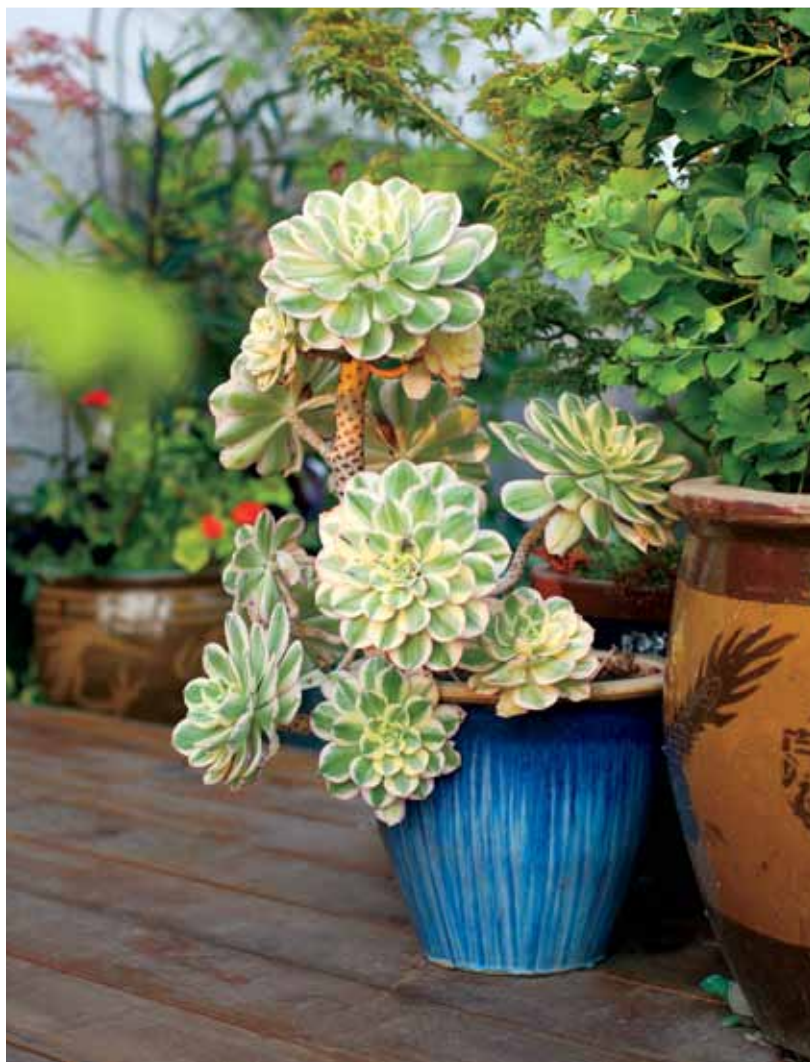
TEXT KAREN YORK | PHOTOGRAPHY JANIS NICOLAY



A lattice with *Clematis* 'Horn of Plenty' screens Paul and April Murphy's colourful backyard deck. Paul plans to prune and shape the small potted purple beech into a bonsai. OPPOSITE: Not your ordinary butterfly bush, *Buddleja* *×weyeriana* 'Sungold' has quirky orange blooms.



The winged thorn rose is grown for its thrilling scarlet thorns and unusual ferny foliage. Paul says its pink-tinged white flowers aren't showy but loves the fact that the plant will grow 2.5 to 3 metres tall in a single season.



ABOVE: A venerable apple tree, remnant of a former orchard, offers gravitas and some shade. Typifying Paul's clever mix of shapes and colours are a rusty-hued Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Villa Taranto'), frothy meadow rue (*Thalictrum rochebruneanum* 'Lavender Mist'), giant Broussa mullein, blue hostas, low-growing sedums, a little golden English yew (*Taxus baccata* Fastigiata Aurea Group) and pale Oriental lilies (*Lilium* 'Aubade'). TOP RIGHT: The fluffy double flower of Blue Chiffon hibiscus (*Hibiscus syriacus* 'Notwood3'). RIGHT: The purple blooms of 'Black Knight' butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii* cv.) are headily scented. LEFT: A potted succulent, *Aeonium* 'Sunburst', shines on the deck.

Paul Murphy's plant-packed urban property in Victoria, British Columbia, is part botanical garden and part Dr. Seuss. By the front door, a tropical-looking tree dahlia (*Dahlia imperialis*) with stems "as thick as my wrist" looms over the roof; huge thistly cardoons (*Cynara cardunculus*) brandish spiked globes resembling medieval maces; and giant Broussa mulleins send up towering spires of flowers over felty silver leaves.

"I like plants with character," says Paul, with considerable understatement. "They can stand alone and also work with others."

"My garden is my laboratory, where I experiment with plants," adds this self-taught garden designer, who turned

a passion into a profession. "It also allows clients to see various plants in situ, even though they'd never want this themselves," he says, gesturing to a particularly exuberant area.

A plant showcase, yes, but it's still a home garden and retreat – a rather exotic one at that, thanks to the design eye of Paul's wife, April. A cedar-hewn backyard deck adorned with glowing onion-shaped lanterns, potted Japanese maples, patterned cushions and a shimmering backdrop of sari fabrics marries Morocco and the Far East.

"Lanterns are our favourite souvenirs," says Paul. "Most recently, we found a beauty in the Marché aux oiseaux in Paris."

The Murphys arrived here in 2007 to an ocean of bindweed-studded lawn

lapping around an ancient apple tree, the last remnant of what was once an orchard. Paul quickly set about removing most of the grass, gave the apple tree a good haircut, hauled in loads of good soil and installed an irrigation system. Then it was all plants on deck. "I came here with about 400 potted plants; now I have about 1,000 different species and varieties, including more than 50 varieties of hosta."

Among his treasures are a wheel tree (*Trochodendron aralioides*) with its whorled branches and tapered leaves; winged thorn rose (*Rosa sericea* ssp. *omeiensis* f. *pteracantha*), grown for its forbidding but fetching crimson thorns; a very rare cutleaf Japanese daimio oak (*Quercus dentata* 'Pinnatifida'); and blue bean tree (*Decaisnea fargesii*), better »



ABOVE: Lanterns are the Murphys' favourite souvenir of their travels. ABOVE, RIGHT: The hybrid tea rose Love & Peace (*Rosa* 'BAIpeace'). RIGHT: Roses and lilies frame a path leading to the lawn area and cushioned bench. "Walls" of tall perennials, such as the false Cretan hemp (*Datisca cannabina*), in the background create needed privacy. OPPOSITE: The glow of bright sari fabrics is nearly matched by the burgundy foliage of an Emperor I Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Wolff'), a fresh green "pre-bonsai" hornbeam and a purple 'Postman's Pride' sedum (*Sedum telephium* [Atropurpureum Group] cv.) in front.



ABOVE: A small goddess resides among 'Magnus' echinaceas and Gold Tide forsythia (*Forsythia* 'Courtesol'). RIGHT: Giant Broussa mullein (*Verbascum bombyciferum*) sends up its whimsical spires by a variegated giant dogwood (*Cornus controversa* 'Variegata'). BELOW: Plant-filled borders enclose the lawn area: "I like to make a garden that can be viewed from all angles," says Paul. OPPOSITE: A side yard vignette includes a red-berried Vilmorin's mountain ash from China (*Sorbus vilmorinii*), lacy willow-leaved stachyurus (*Stachyurus salicifolius*), 'Calypso' hosta and the splashy variegated elder, *Sambucus nigra* 'Pulverulenta'.

garden stats

SIZE: 765 square metres **ZONE:** 8 **ORIENTATION:** Back garden faces north; front garden south **AGE OF GARDEN:** 6 years **CONDITIONS:** Mostly sun; clay with pockets of friable soil thanks to ongoing conditioning; wet in winter, dry in summer **FOCUS:** A collector's garden with more than 1,000 species and varieties **GROWING SEASON:** Year-round **FAVOURITE PRODUCT:** Hori hori knife, excellent for digging, weeding, planting, root pruning and more **TIP:** Use mulch and compost but don't forget micronutrients: Add glacial rock dust and bone meal when planting and liquid kelp fertilizer throughout the growing season





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Joe Pye weed's (*Eutrochium maculatum*) rosy flowers contrast with the silvery leaves of Scots thistle (*Onopordon acanthium*) and *Euphorbia myrsinites*. Cardoon's medieval seedheads are carried aloft on 2.5-metre stems. An odd succulent, the hairy houseleek (*Jovibarba hirta*) rears up from its pot by the miniature rose 'Neon Cowboy' and David Austin's Molineux ('AUSmol') roses. OPPOSITE: Paul set out paths and large plants first, filling in with myriad perennials, including daylilies, irises, lilies and cimicifugas.

known as dead man's fingers for its bizarre blue seed pods.

A true plant collector treads a fine line between pleasing diversity and leafy chaos. "There's not a lot of repetition of plants," Paul says, "but of shape, colour and texture. It's like a jigsaw puzzle that is always changing."

This is a sensual garden, one to walk through slowly, following the winding paths from the sun-filled front garden filled with deer-resistant euphorbias, barberries and dwarf conifers, round past the heavily underplanted apple tree and the "boggy" patch in back with moisture-loving gunnera, willow, skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*),

and 'Mammoth' ironweed (*Vernonia arkansana* cv.) to a circle of lawn that offers a remarkable 360-degree view of Paul's dense but artful plantings.

"I love to plant thickly," he says. "I set out the main trees and shrubs and then use lots of fillers, such as irises, daylilies and hardy geraniums – Rozanne (*Geranium* 'Gerwat') is particularly good – so you get interesting combos quickly. It's more work in the long term because of all the transplanting involved but I'm willing to pay that price."

Statuesque perennials add all-important vertical exclamation points but Paul has also planted more than 20 trees, sticking to relatively small

and/or narrow ones to preserve the garden's scale and permit more underplanting. "Trees like the dwarf American sweetgum 'Gum Ball' (*Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Gum Ball') and Red Fox katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum* 'Rotfuchs') are ideal for urban lots. Crimson Pointe plum (*Prunus* × *cerasifera* 'Cripoizam') is another excellent exclamation point, and the snakebark maple (*Acer davidii*), which promises to become the biggest tree here, is handsome all year-round."

Gum balls, snaky bark, a rainbow of colours...Dr. Seuss's little orange Lorax, who speaks for the trees, would be right at home.

