

# AT HOME

A STANDOUT IN THE CITY OF GARDENS

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Victoria, on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada enjoys moderate weather year-round. December and January temperatures reach from approximately 35 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit, with heavy precipitation, but rarely snow. July and August traditionally see averages in the low 70s and are quite dry. The mild temperatures and wet winters allow for a wide range of flowers and plants, resulting in Victoria's nickname: the City of Gardens.

Paul Murphy, of Victoria-based Paul Murphy Gardens, has designed and created gardens for clients for more than fifteen years. He has also been a practicing gardener in his own residences for nearly twenty years. "My wife and I moved into our current home in urban Victoria in 2007," he explains. "Our lot size is standard, about 8,200 square feet. From the day we moved in, I wanted to create a collector's garden, so we began planning immediately." Over the past nine years, the garden's growth culminated in a small area of grass encompassed by an incredible four-season garden with 750 different species and varieties of plants.

In the first few years, Murphy worked on the "bones" of the garden, which meant focusing on trees and major shrubs. Much of the existing ground was clay and bedrock, so they had to bring in soil before planting. "The first step in creating a garden is designing an irrigation system, but you must remember that any irrigation system is only mostly

efficient," he adds. "There will always be areas that will still need hand watering." Hand watering is a really good way to visit each plant. "It gives you the opportunity to see how each plant is doing [and] whether there is any sign of disease or if the plant looks unhappy or unhealthy," he says. Murphy also spent a good deal of time figuring out how to break up the yard. "We wanted a sitting area and several garden rooms separated by meandering paths," he explains.

The planting areas were turned into berms by raising them with soil, which left valleys that eventually became the paths. Murphy filled in the leveled valleys with crushed screening, which is crushed local stone, and tamped it down until it created a solid walkway. "The paths are not straight, but rather work their way around the berms, helping to create the separate garden rooms," he says. "The paths lead you from one garden room to another." The rooms' plantings differ based on the

Early on, Paul Murphy and his wife knew they wanted to include a sitting area, as well as garden "rooms" that reflected a variety of environmental conditions.







## From the Start

Paul Murphy encourages new gardeners to wait at least a year or so before beginning a garden. He feels it helps to experience the daylight and seasonal changes before deciding on what plants to use. Here are a few of his plant suggestions for some basic environments.

### Shade:

Rhododendron, *Podophyllum peltatum* (Chinese Mayapple), Epimedium (Bishop's Hat or Barrenwort), and Hosta

### Sun:

*Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (Katsura Tree), *Sambucus nigra* (Elderberry), Miscanthus 'Giganteus', and Ficus

### Wet:

*Acer rubrum* (Red Maple), *Salix magnifica*, *Arundo donax* (Cane), and Iris

### Dry:

*Arctostaphylos manzanita*, *Kniphofia rooperi* (Poker Plant), Sedum, and Agave





environmental conditions in each specific area. Although the overall climate is consistent, microclimates formed alongside the house or under shrubs or trees; some have all-day sun while others are in shade; some are wet while others are very dry. The front of the house faces south and the rear faces north, which also impacts the microclimates. Murphy is an expert at *zonal denial*—planting items that are not typical in an environment. “I like to experiment. I like testing plants to see what might actually work in each climate,” he adds.

Potted plants create a visual statement. “I build my pots with layers—a thriller, which is a taller centerpiece plant placed in the back or middle of the pot; a filler, a lower plant that complements the centerpiece without overwhelming it; and a spiller plant that gracefully overflows the pot,” says Murphy. He uses some large pots that position the bottom of the plant above the grazing zone of deer to discourage the animals from eating them. And, he advises gardeners to water and fertilize potted plants a bit more than those in the ground. He warns that potted plants should be treated as

if they occupy one planting zone colder, because their roots are not as protected as those deep in the ground.

Another garden room—a lovely sitting area and patio—were added near the back of the home. “Greg Williams, a local contractor with twenty years’ experience in Victoria, constructed the lattice and furniture bases of local, recycled cedar,” says Murphy. “The space is a *happy* place with vines and trees that provide a feeling of seclusion and comfort.” The patio is paved with locally sourced flagstone framed by Irish moss. The hanging lanterns that appear in this area and are tucked around the landscape are souvenirs that have been collected over years of travel by Murphy and his wife.

Murphy says he would never have been able to complete his collectors’ garden without his wife’s contributions and the help of friends and neighbors. Because Victoria’s climate is so conducive to gardening, there are plenty of creative residents who love working together to enhance and beautify their City of Gardens. ■

Murphy says his garden is an ongoing project that is always evolving. He learns from his experience there and that allows him to teach others. His garden also serves as his gym and allows him a place for meditation.