Wild at heart

This Long Island garden in New York State, with its mix of wild and precise planting, challenges established ideas about plant hardiness.

WORDS DANIEL J. HINKLEY | PHOTOGRAPHS CLAIRE TAKACS

In brief

Name The Gardens at Landscraft
What An imaginative and creative yet almost garden, using a wide palette of hardy and tropical species.
Where Mattituck, New York State, USA
Size Three acres
Soil Rich sandy clay over sand pH 6.2
Climate Hardy and frost-resistant very cold winters
Hardiness rating USDA 6
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In brief
Nenne The Gardens at Landcraft
Wild An imaginative and creative plant planted garden, using a wild palette of hardy and modest species.
Where Mattituck, New York State, USA
Size Three acres
Soil Rich sandy clay over sand gravel
Climate Humid but sunny summers, very cold winters

This page: Between Crambe de ur caulescent hedging, NK Japanese evening primrose, Nelumbo, and a tunnel of Physocarpus opulifolius "Grandiflora," understudied with Dianthus 'White' and prunella rubra "Red Balance." Facing page: Around the sunken fire, the plant covered rocks of Persicaria "Amethyst green" and wall of Pulmonaria "Shaded Blue" create a textural and color contrast with the live gravel of selected sedums and Geranium sanguineum "Phoeniceum."
I like to have more maintained and designed areas close to the house; further away the garden is more relaxed and less specialised.

Although it may be considered an oversimplification by some, I find that gardens generally fit one of two moulds. There are those that have been designed to be admired from their perimeters, as if peering into a dream. And there are those, more satisfying in my mind, that are meant to be experienced from within. One, the sterile reception room with furniture not intended for sitting and the other, the cozy den with overstuffed chairs and a friendly inventory of old-used artifacts.

The complex and elaborately planted garden of Dennis Schrader and Bill Smith fits within the parameters of the latter. Found within 17 acres of the fertile northeastern shore of New York’s Long Island, it is a precise and painterly garden, where a romantic wash of Moeck collides with an exotic Guignol.

From the entrance to the three-acre garden, with its knot garden and terraces that present hundreds of containers, which can be replenished up to five times a year, the garden becomes more relaxed as you venture from the house, until it blends seamlessly into the surrounding agricultural land.

“My design intent changes with each specific area of the garden,” says Dennis. “Overall I like to have more maintained and heavily designed areas close to the house. Moving away from the house the garden is more relaxed and less specified.”

Relatively close to the terraces, but mostly hidden by jungly mixed borders focusing on bold foliage evocative of the tropics — bananas, cannas, palms, colocasias, tetrapanax — is the garden’s social hub: the Tikis Hot. Many of the plants that surround this pavilion — indeed tender species throughout the garden — are relocated to heated quarters during the winter months when temperatures can plummet to -18°C or below.

It is through this process of experimentation with tropicals and unusual annuals and perennials that the pair have illuminated the inherent hardiness of many plant species believed inappropriate for the region, especially if micro-sited. Eucary species, for example, thrive in raised beds adjacent to the house, where they are given extra sharp drainage. The duo

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Although it may be considered an oversimplification by some, I find that gardens generally fall into two moulds. These are those that have been designed to be admired from their perimeter, as in peacocks into a domain, and there are those, more satisfying in my mind, that are meant to be experienced from within. One, the sterile reception room with furniture not intended for sitting and the other the cozy den with overstuffed chairs and a friendly menagerie of oft-used artefacts.

The complex and elaborately planted garden of Dennis Schrader and Bill Smith fits within the parameters of the latter. Found within 17 acres of the fertile southeastern shore of New York’s Long Island, it is a precise and patience garden, where a romantic wash of Myosotis collides with an exotic Gaillardia.

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In autumn the Rhododendron 'Douchka' is a blaze of orange-red foliage with red clusters of bud, while peacock dewlaps drape the hedges from green to a rich buttery yellow.

A pigeon roosts at the Tai Hut, nestled among bare shrubs and perennials, including fuchsia 'Festival', Stipa gigantea, and seedheads of Elymus hirsutus.
A bench beneath a pair of Fatsia japonica looks out to soft autumn planting, including the plumes of Pennisetum alopecuroides and bold, red flowers of Persicaria angulata 'Festiva'.

Surrounded by drifts of grasses, including Sporobolus heterolepis and Stipa tenuifolia, is Dennis and Bill’s latest installation—a sunken stone seat, with a roof of strapwort and assorted sedums.

The winding path to an Adirondack chair is lined by a rich mix of textures and colours from the light airy Pennisetum alopecuroides to the darker Alnus incana ‘Skimmia’, with the rich blue of Laurus nobilis.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Dennis and Bill’s wholesale nursery, Landcraft Environments, which specialises in topicals, tender perennials and unusual annuals, at landcraftenvironment.com

Turn the page for 24 point recommendations
A bench beneath a pair of Deutzia crenata looks out on to soft autumn planting, including the plumes of Persicaria bistorta and bold, wild flowers of Persicaria amplexicaulis 'Tetragona'.

Surrounded by drifts of grasses, including Sporobolus heterolepis and Stipa calamagrostis. In Dennis and Bill's latest installation -- a sunken stone folly, with a moat tapestry of assorted sedums.

The winding path to an Ardniknock chair is lined by a rich mix of textures and colours from the light and airy Persicaria affinis to the darker Juncus communis and the erect lines of Juncus effusus.

The daphne flowers of Mahonia aquifolium subsp. aquifolium "Dark Eddy" rise above its foliage and the surrounding Echinosalvia seedheads.

Drummond's note that paying no attention to conventional wisdom is no enemy to a creative garden. From the Tikis Hut, you are led through a pensively planted double border of subtle colours and textures with a reliance on grasses, in particular Stipa capensis and Juncus effusus 'Rubriflorus', to a series of areas hedged by clipped horehound that hold the spaces together throughout the seasons. Each is reconfigured on a yearly basis, and each springing significantly different from the next.

Pauls with interconnecting villas are the connective thread between these areas. Each negative image of each other: in one begonia Cotinus coggygria 'Royal Cloak' and Carex trachyphylla 'Purpurea' in the other golden Cotinus coggygria 'Golden Spirit' ('Aurora') and Carex 'Aurora', both accented with grasses, perennials and annuals that join the play of colour co-ordination.

Beyond the more rigidly designed garden is a 12-acre managed meadow where the couple have erected a nesting platform that was readily accepted by a pair of eagles. Now, on a yearly basis, they can witness the nest building and rearing of young, adding yet another layer of entertainment to a garden that already possesses a certain serenity.

"We have different destinations within the garden. Some are more intensely planted to provide a more enhanced experience of the space, and others are more naturally planted to give a natural, relaxed, more fluid look," says Dennis.

This deliberate transition from formal to wild may have been interrupted by their latest installation, a stone folly sunk into the ground like the foundations of ancient ruin. It's surrounded by a slight rise possessing a congregation of grasses, hardy perennials and self-seeding Verbascums. There are only a handful of contemporary gardens in North America where craft and passion have collided with such force and precision as here, and I leave with inspiration heavily一幕化 in envy.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Dennis and Bill's website: LandCare Environments, which specializes in tropicals, tender perennials and unusual annuals: landcareenvironment.com

Turn the page for 24 plant recommendations
of Dennis and Bill’s key plants

1. Agastache ‘Apricot Sunrise’
   Drought tolerant, short lived perennial that needs full sun and well-drained soils. (4m. USDA 3b-9b)

2. Digitalis x mertonensis ‘Berry Canary’
   Perennial with long display of吸引ively colored stems on tall stems. Tends to seed as an annual. (1.2m. USDA 3b-10b)

3. Jasminum officinale ‘Forna Sunrise’ (‘Praga’)
   Offers fragrant white flowers, although it is possibly most useful in lending its charmless foliage to the scene. (6m. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 7a-12b)

4. Hibiscus Aristatus ‘Michael Dodge’
   Golden bracts form a white summer flowers, adding depth to the autumn garden and looking great when fully ripened. (3m. USDA 5a-9b)

5. Persicaria amplexicaulis ‘Firetail’
   Non-stop flowering from June to October makes this Persicaria indispensable. (1.2m. RHS HC, USDA 5a-9b)

6. Penstemon villosus
   A vividly colored plant with soft plumes of white blooms from late summer to autumn. Likes full sun in well-drained soil. (60cm. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 5a-9b)

7. Phlomis sibirica ‘Marsvan’
   The striking flowers of this South African shrub has an air of evergreen with soft stems clad with soft yellow, tubular flowers throughout summer and autumn. (1.2m. RHS H3, USDA 3b-12b)

8. Nicotiana argenteifolia
   Self-seeds freely but only seeded sparingly, adds a late summer and fall burst of greenish-yellow flowers. Needs full sun. (1.5m. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 5a-9b)

9. Salvia splendens ‘Van-Houttei’
   A tender annual that adds vibrancy with its variegated foliage and scarlet flowers. Most vibrant in full sun. (1.2m. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 3b-12)

10. Agastache ‘Summer Glow’
    Memorable for colour and fragrance foliage. Greenest in London as an annual or short-lived perennial. (70cm. RHS HC, USDA 6a-9b)

11. Chrysanthemum Sheffield
    A classic garden Chrysanthemum that is long living and produces perennial in late summer and early autumn. (90cm. USDA 6a-9b)

12. Hydrangea paniculata ‘Grandiflora’
    A classic cultivar with flowers that are many fewer than others, full sun or light shade. (4m. RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b)

13. Salvia ‘Wisey’s White’
    Liberally self-seeds, with an abundance of purple flowers throughout summer and autumn. (3m. USDA 6a-10b)

14. Echium digitalifolium
    Moderately green growth for the pendulous heads of seeds, needs full sun and well-drained soil. (70cm)

15. Melianthus australis ‘Savannah Ruby’
    A grass admired for its pink flowers above green, blue-green foliage. (30cm. USDA 7a-12b)

16. Euphorbia characias ‘Silver Blue’
    A superb, winged selection with powder-blue, silver-green foliage. Needs full sun and well-drained soils. (60cm. USDA 7a-12b)

17. Chloris virgata
    A graceful grass grown for its late flowers and seedheads. (50cm)

18. Lilium formosanum
    From Taiwan, will blossom in a single year from seed and will self-sow throughout the garden. (2m. USDA 5a-9b)

19. Salvia ‘Amistad’
    A tough perennial with dark and sturdy stems clothed with dark branched, deep blue flowers from midsummer to end. (1.2m. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 9a-10b)

20. Imperata cylindrica ‘Rubra’
    The Japanese grass, will smother by flowering through the garden but will not, unfortunately, self-sow. Its low-cut stems are best used in flower beds. (40cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b)

21. Bouvardia grandiflora ‘Blonde Ambition’
    A blue grass, with long flowering seedheads of bright yellow/gold following chartreuse flowers. (90cm. USDA 4a-9b)

22. Salvia viridis var. comata
    An annual clary sage that self-seeds with long-lasting, bracted flowers and foliage with a lovely smoky fragrance. (40cm)

23. Echinacea ‘Mackin’ Red’
    One of a range of new, double echinaceas. Indispensable (2m. full sun and well-drained soils. (90cm. USDA 3b-9b)

24. Sporobolus heterolepis
    Wonderful late-summer flowers and wispy (90cm. USDA 3b-9b)
of Dennis and Bill's key plants

1. Agastache 'Apricot Sunrise'
   Drought tolerant, short-lived perennial that needs full sun and well-drained soils.
   [USDA 5a-9b]

2. Digitalis x walter 'Ferry Canyon'
   Perennial, long display of waxy blossoms on tall stems. Tremendous as an annual
   1.2m, USDA 9b-20

3. Jasminum officinale Fina Sunrise (+'Fina')
   Offers fragrant, white flowers, although it is possibly most useful in lending its chartreuse foliage to the scene.
   6m, AGMO, RHS H3, USDA 7a-11

4. Habranthus 'Michael Dodge'
   Golden terracotta flowers white summer flowers, adding depth to the autumn gardens and better for beds when fully ripened.
   3m, USDA 3a-6b

5. Persicaria amplexicaulis 'Firstfall'
   Non-stop flowering from June to October makes this Persicaria indispensable.
   1.2m, RHS H1, USDA 5a-9b

6. Persicaria vivipara
   A deciduous grass with soft plumes of white awns from late summer to autumn. Lives full sun in well-drained 9a-10b.
   60cm, AGMO, RHS H3, USDA 5a-9b

7. Phlomis fruticosa 'Moonraker'
   The slender flowers of this South African shrub add an element of weight with erect stems clad with soft yellow tubular flowers through the summer and autumn.
   1.2m, RHS H1, USDA 7a-11

8. Nicotiana langsdorffii
   Self-seeds liberally but rarely exceeds, adding a late summer and autumn splash of greenish-yellow flowers. Needs full sun.
   1.5m, AGMO, RHS H2, USDA 5a-9b

9. Salvia splendens 'Van-Houttei'
   Very hardy, a tender perennial that adds vibrancy with both its variegated foliage and scented flowers. Best in sun or semi-shade.
   1.2m, AGMO, RHS H3, USDA 5a-9b

10. Agastache 'Summer Glow'
    Memorable colour and fragrant foliage. Green at Landscafe as an annual in short-lived perennial.
    70cm, RHS H3, USDA 6a-9b

11. Chrysanthemum 'Sheffield'
    A classic garden chrysanthemum that is long-lasting and thrives on a sunny, well-drained site.
    90cm, USDA 6a-9b

12. Hydrangea panicea 'Grandiflora'
    A fast-growing, easy to transplant. There are many newer cultivars. Full sun or light shade. 4m, RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b

13. Salvia 'Wendy's Wish'
    Liberally self-seeds, white with an arcing spread and display of purple flowers. Thrives in sunny and well-drained soil. 3m, USDA 6a-9b

14. Centaurea cineraria 'Skyer Blue'
    60cm, USDA 7a-9b

15. Chionodoxa 'sageae'
    A lovely late-spring flower for its late and flowers and seedheads. 50cm.

16. Lithospermum articulatum
    From Taiwan, will blossom in a single year from seed and will self-seed throughout the garden. 2m, USDA 5a-9b

17. Salvia Armeria
    A tough perennial with full and sturdy stems clad with black-bracted, deep blue flowers for months in end.
    1.2m, AGMO, RHS H1, USDA 5a-9a

18. Imperata cylindrica 'Rubra'
    The Japanese bamboo grass, will smother by alleys throughout the garden but will overtake, fortunately, self seed. Its bronzy-red blades are best seen in late winter.
    40cm, RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b

19. Bouvardia frondens 'Blonde Ambition'
    A blue, white flower that self-seeds in full sun, adding height and colour to the garden.
    40cm, USDA 4a-9b

20. Salvia exigua 'Van Cortlandt'
    An annual that can self-seed in light shade, mixed flowers and foliage with a lovely smoky fragrance.
    40cm

21. Echinacea 'Monet Red'
    One of an array of new, double echinaceas. Indispensable in full sun and well-drained soils. 90cm, USDA 3a-6b

22. Spentulus heterolobus
    Wonderful late-spring flowers and sensational seedheads with a scent of cut tobacco peas.
    1m, USDA 3b-5b