



First Impressions

BID FRONT-DOOR DOLDRUMS FAREWELL WITH AN EASY-CARE GARDEN PLAN.

by JULIE A. MARTENS Photographs by PETE KRUMHARDT AND KIM CORNELISON

Landscape designer KRISTOPHER DABNER, THE GREENSMAN

Overgrown shrubs overpowered the entrance to a home in Overland Park, Kansas, stealing the spotlight from the house's traditional Tudor lines. At our request, local landscape designer Kristopher Dabner collaborated with the homeowners to design a garden that makes the entrance grand, no matter the season.

"The couple liked the idea of having a contained flower garden," Dabner says. "They're novice gardeners and wanted to start small. This bed gives them the opportunity to learn to garden without being overwhelmed." To cut costs, the homeowners started by removing the home's original, too-big shrubs themselves, and then Dabner's team arrived to install the new garden.

The existing soil proved to be lackluster—mostly clay. Heaping helpings of local compost improved soil drainage and fertility, giving new plants a healthy outlook. "We chose simple, long-blooming perennials that thrive without special care, but they needed good soil to establish and grow," Dabner says.

The homeowners had a concrete urn that Dabner decided would be the belle of the bed. Its classic shape complements the home's architectural style. The urn,

Right The team gets organized by sketching the garden plan on paper before purchasing plants. They then use the plan to create a shopping list, and consult it while planting the garden. *Opposite* Just after planting, the garden lends a lush and welcoming feel to the entry and softens the lines of the house to create an inviting scene.





THE PROJECT

We asked landscape designer Kristopher Dabner to transform a ho-hum entry overrun with untended shrubs into an inviting dooryard garden. Inexperienced gardeners, the homeowners wanted this small space to cultivate the start of a garden hobby.

MAKEOVER TEAM Mary Harmon, Brett Daniel, Raul Abonce, and Kristopher Dabner from The Greensman, Kansas City, Missouri.

TIME 6 hours (excludes time spent shopping for materials)

COST \$838



Groom a living welcome mat with a few choice shrubs and perennials.

along with a trio of evergreen elements—a boxwood hedge, an Alberta spruce, and yews near the front door—anchor the garden through winter. The perennial plantings boast hues that blend easily with the brick exterior: purple, blue, yellow, and white.

"We used basic, simple plants that people can purchase at a local nursery or home improvement store," Dabner says. His favorites for long-season interest include pincushion flower (*Scabiosa* spp.), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), and Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*).

Artemisia arborescens provides a steady silver backdrop for other bloomers and also offers support for floppy flowers such as Russian sage.

The end result, after one season's growth, is a garden that's lush and full. Dabner coached the couple through the first season's ongoing plant care. "As their confidence builds, we plan to add a second bed on the other side of the front door," he says. "By then, we'll be able to divide the perennials in this bed and use the excess to stock the second bed."

"Front yard gardens should be welcoming," Dabner says. This dooryard measures up with its mix of perennial color and evergreen steadiness.

For more information, see the Buyer's Guide on page 108.



AFTER ONE SEASON OF GROWTH

SOIL SMARTS

Most soil can stand improving. The best way to know exactly what to add is to have your soil tested. Ideal garden soil is known as loam—it has a consistency similar to chocolate cake. If you squeeze a little in your hand, it sticks together somewhat but still crumbles apart easily. Use these guidelines to improve your soil quality.

CLAY SOIL: Add as much organic matter—compost, composted manure, peat moss, or humus—as you want. Do not add sand alone to heavy clay soils, or you risk creating a concretelike substance. Mix sand with peat moss or compost first and then thoroughly mix into soil. Add organic matter annually until soil is desired consistency.

SANDY OR HIGH-SILT SOIL: Blend topsoil with compost or peat moss, and add to soil.

ALKALINE SOIL: Mix peat moss or oak leaf mold into planting beds to lower the pH. Some plants, such as azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, and blueberries, need acid soil.

TIPS FROM THE PROS

Every front yard is different, but Kristopher Dabner shares his secrets for making your entry the toast of the neighborhood.

- **PREPARE YOUR SOIL.** Add organic matter to soil before planting. Dabner prefers locally available compost, such as that made by garden centers or private farms. To find a source in your area, look in the yellow pages under "Recycling."

- **BE MAINTENANCE-MINDED.** For an easy-care garden, select plants that don't demand daily attention. In this garden, Dabner chose shrubs that don't require heavy pruning.

Annual trimming keeps the boxwoods tidy; twice-yearly snipping holds the yews in check. Shape the lilac standards flanking the front door annually, right after bloom. Perennials need to be deadheaded as flowers fade; in fall or early spring, cut old growth back to a few inches from the ground.

- **STAGE THE SEASONS.** Plant bulbs this fall for spring blooms. Use evergreens and structural objects, such as an urn, to maintain visual interest through winter.

- **MEASURE UP.** Carefully consider the size of the space you have and how much you can reasonably fit. Remember that you need access to plants for trimming and deadheading.

- **SHOP SMART.** Plan your front yard makeover in phases: do one bed, then another in the following season or year to reduce costs. Dabner suggests making a plant shopping list and sticking to it. "When you have a list, you can shop at hardware and home improvement stores successfully. Try to buy plants when they're fresh off the truck for best quality," he says. He also urges getting plant starts from neighbors. "It's a way to make friends and get helpful advice about what grows best in your area!"



(1) A crew member loosens the burlap around a 'Hicksii' yew before back-filling the planting hole. (2) After planting, the boxwoods are trimmed to create a uniform hedge. (3) A crew member levels the urn which is set on a buried cinder block and tamped sand. (4) This medley of summer annuals will be replaced by fall bloomers at the end of the season.

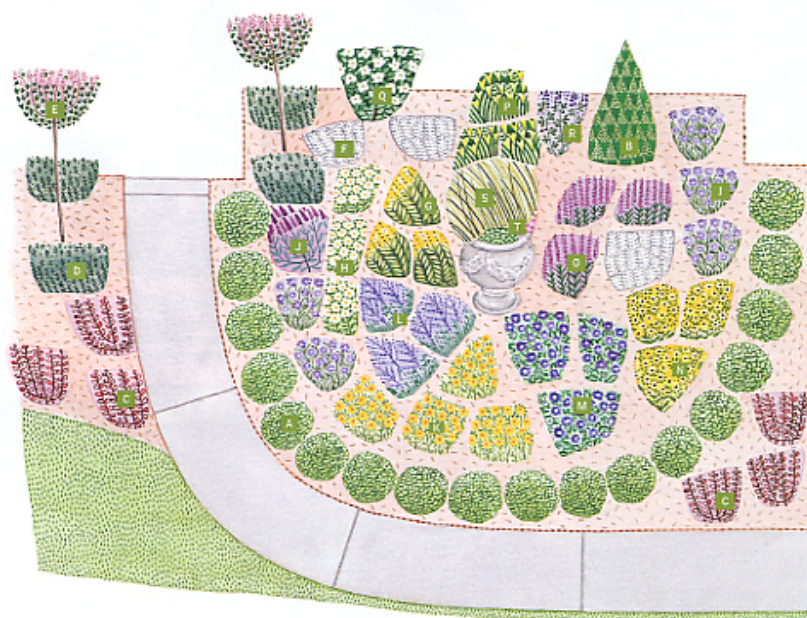


FOCAL POINT FINESSE

Whether you're staging an entry area or a secluded backyard getaway, your garden needs a focus—something that's eye-catching and draws guests into your escape. Keep durability and maintenance at front of mind when selecting objects. Stone is the longest-lasting choice; iron lasts but can rust if not treated. Paint on objects will fade and eventually peel and terra-cotta can crack and crumble if exposed to wintry conditions.

Containers, sculptural elements, furnishings—such as a bench or chair—water gardens, and petal-packed flowers can all play the role of garden star. Select your favorite element and make it the point of your patch.

AFTERNOON MAKEOVER |



MATERIALS LIST

- A. Boxwood (*Buxus koreana* var. *japonica* 'Winter Gem')
- B. Alberta spruce (*Picea glauca* var. *albertiana* 'Conica')
- C. Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Crimson Pygmy')
- D. Yew (*Taxus x media* 'Hicksii')
- E. Korean lilac standards (*Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin')
- F. *Artemisia arborescens* 'Powis Castle'
- G. Goldenrod (*Solidago sphacelata* 'Golden Fleece')
- H. Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum* 'Becky')
- I. Pincushion flower (*Scabiosa columbaria* 'Butterfly Blue')
- J. *Buddleja davidii*
- K. *Careopsis lanceolata* 'Baby Sun'
- L. Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia* 'Little Spire')
- M. Stokes' aster (*Stokesia laevis* 'Blue Danube')
- N. Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*)
- O. *Salvia x sylvestris* 'May Night'
- P. Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* 'Happy Returns')
- Q. *Hibiscus* 'Disco Bell' Series
- R. *Baptisia australis*
- S. Maidengrass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus')
- T. Assorted annuals

Above The plan for the entry garden is simple: an arc of boxwood and barberry contain an informal mix of easy-blooming perennials.

COST

Shrubs	\$504
Perennials	\$227
Annuals	\$17
1 cubic yard compost	\$36
12 bags hardwood mulch	\$54
TOTAL	\$838