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Serenity in the City

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Turn a neglected backyard into a personal oasis by following the lead of these garden designers.

Mixing traditional woody plants with more exotic varieties adds color and texture to this Michigan shade garden.

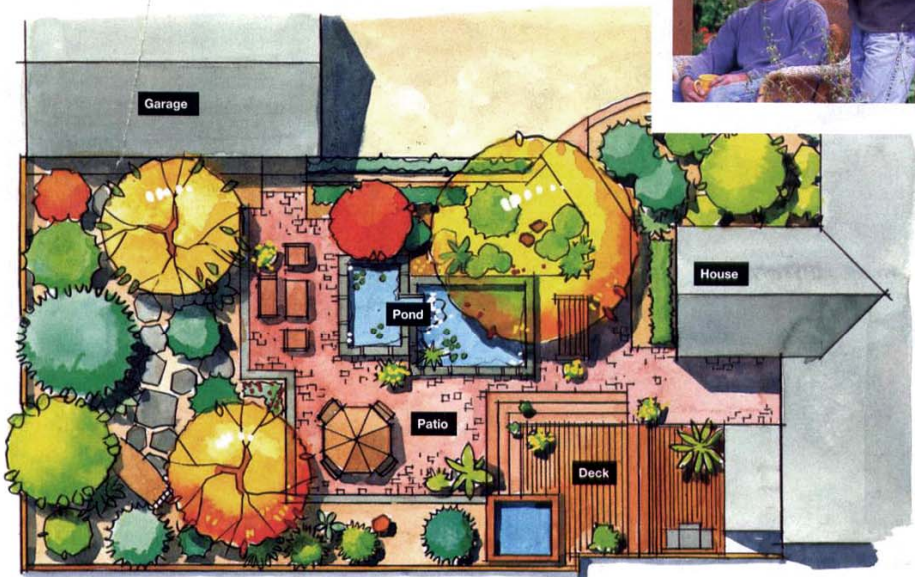
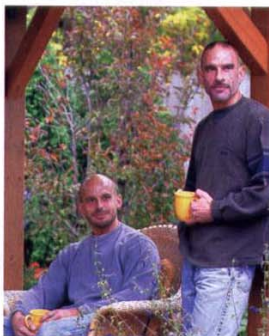
The street side of this 1920s tudor in suburban Detroit, while handsome enough, offers few clues to its backyard riches. Walk past the black wrought-iron gate that divides the front yard from the back, and you'll discover that a small space is no excuse for small ideas.

Filling this average city backyard is a lush landscape that would make even large-space gardeners envious. In the back corner, a hammock sways gently. Nearby, a spacious patio and sitting area offer room for relaxing and entertaining. Closer to the house, a hot tub bubbles an invitation to a private deck, while

colorful koi swim in a two-tiered pond. Shade-loving trees and plants and salvaged architectural elements tie it all together. It's hard to believe the entire yard measures just 40x65 feet.

Some gardeners may have wondered what could be done with the postage-stamp-size plot. Filled with old mulch and dominated by an awkward deck that stretched 30 feet into the small yard, it was anything but the city oasis its new owners, garden designers Dan Jones and

OPPOSITE: Fusion 'Infrared' impatiens, purple-leaf coralbells, and variegated Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola') surround a rhododendron near the pond. **RIGHT:** Dan Jones and Brian Rankel aren't afraid to experiment with plant combinations. "I like the contrast between woodland plants and tropicals," Brian says. "It works even though they don't belong together."





QUICK TIPS

Using found objects is a great way to add a personal touch to your garden. Here are some tips from garden designers Brian Rankel and Dan Jones:

■ **Keep an eye out.** "Our favorite sources are salvage yards and antique markets, but garage sales, estate sales, and trash are also great places to look," Brian says.

■ **Take it with you.** Garden antiques are keepers. If you move, take them with you. "Even if you don't have a place to put them at first, they're a good source of inspiration for your new place," Dan says.

■ **Make the ordinary extraordinary.** Old bathtubs and sinks make great ponds and planters. Worn mirrors add depth and dimension to a wall or fence. Iron fencing and gates can be used as trellises.



Brian Rankel, knew it could be when they purchased the house in March 2004. "We wanted the yard to serve as a personal retreat for us and as a place where we could show other gardeners and our clients what was possible in a small space," Brian says.

The first thing they did was look up—literally—for inspiration, noting three large oaks and a towering red maple that shaded the property. A stockade fence surrounded the yard, providing a framework and offering privacy from nearby neighbors.

"The key to making a small garden work is to start by thinking vertically, not horizontally," Brian explains. "I knew that if we planted evergreens and

ABOVE: An attractive grouping of yellow impatiens, golden mums, African mask, trailing coleus, and *Philodendron* soften the edges of the deck and mark the location of the steps. **OPPOSITE:** Repeating colors, such as these golden and yellow mums, helps the garden feel connected.

taller trees in front of the fence, it would essentially become invisible, while still offering us the privacy we needed," he says. The only part of the fence they replaced was the tallest section next to the house, which measures 10 feet at its highest point.

With the garden's vertical elements in place, the pair designed a landscape inspired in part by the floor plan inside their vintage home. "We wanted a feeling of separate rooms, not just one big overall out-

ABOUT THE POND

When identifying priorities, Brian and Dan placed a water feature at the top of their list. "It screens out less-desirable city noises and brings both soothing sounds and wildlife into the yard," Dan says.

The angular Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired pond is a first for them. "We've designed many ponds, but nothing like this one," says Brian. They

abandoned plans for a more natural-looking pond after unearthing a 1930s concrete reflecting pool. "The concrete was 2 feet thick and smack in the middle of the yard," Brian remembers. "At first we didn't know what to do."

Rather than trying to rip it out, they used the base as the foundation for a new pond. Now, the smaller raised water feature

drains into a larger ground-level pond below. A bluestone veneer ties the two together.

Pond maintenance includes draining and powerwashing in the spring and using a pool skimmer year-round to keep the ponds clean. In winter, the top pond is drained and dozens of koi and comets are moved to the lower pond, where a bubbler keeps the water oxygenated.



door room," Dan says. "The pond and nearby bench function as the foyer or welcoming area; the outdoor seating area and patio midgarden, as the living and dining room; the hammock area, as a bedroom; and the whirlpool, as a master bath."

Tying the rooms together are "walls" of shade-loving trees and bushes in varying heights and textures and "carpets" of easy-care plants. Outdoor furniture and carefully chosen garden ornaments—many favorite vintage architectural pieces collected through the years—add color, comfort, and personality. Wide paths and plenty of breathing room between elements keep the garden from feeling crowded.

Brian and Dan finished their outdoor rooms with proper lighting. Small lights outline the trunks of the overhead oaks and twinkle throughout the patio, plantings, and pond. "It was definitely designed to be an evening garden," Dan says. "We wanted to be able to entertain and enjoy the space at night."

Michigan's North Woods provided another source of inspiration. "The tall trees

gave us the feeling that we were in the woods up north, one of our favorite places, so we decided to capitalize on that," Dan says. Michigan's state tree, a large white pine, now screens the back of the yard from the neighbors. Low-growing, shade-tolerant trees such as striped bark maple, white birch, redbud, and dogwood add further interest and texture, as do underplantings of evergreens, colorful azalea and rhododendron, and easy-care annuals.

"Even the pond was designed with a waterfall to simulate a woody feeling," Brian says. "When you're back here on a summer day and the water is gurgling, you feel like you're hundreds of miles away from the city, which is exactly the feeling we wanted." □

OPPOSITE: Reddish-orange blooms of Fusion 'Infrared' impatiens echo the trim on the garage doors. BELOW: White pine, globe blue spruce, spotted lungwort, and ferns offer pleasing texture. RIGHT: Colorful koi brighten the dark pond waters.

