

Country Gardens

43
CAREFREE
Houseplants
page 76

**Create
Cottage
Style**
with Raised Beds

Microgreens
Small Leaves,
Big Flavor

**Spring
Favorites**
• Hellebores
• Orchids
• Strawberries

**Cool
Collectibles**
Bulb-Forcing
Vases

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BHG SIP Yellow Checkout

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Photography by Kindra Clineff

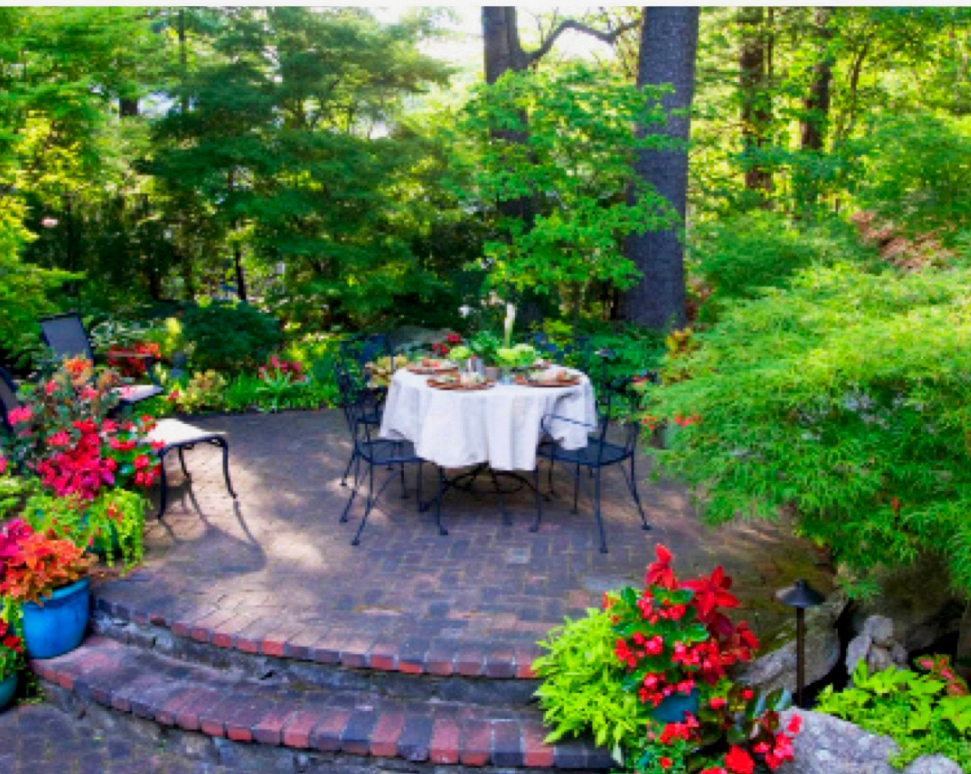
Water Works

With two waterfalls and a fishpond, this suburban Boston acre makes a splash and offers serenity.

SARAH BOYNTON'S INITIAL beautification efforts on her suburban Boston acre were met with befuddlement by those who observed her. Not only did she glorify the existing rocks, she augmented the bounty of boulders with additional stone. And then there was her strategy of embracing shade. While everyone else was wielding chainsaws, Sarah was bulking up on trees and blithely tucking ferns beneath.

"At least, people understand it now," Sarah says of her rocky oasis.

Given that Sarah spent her formative years exploring rocky woodlands, the massive rocks in residence on their land when she married and moved in with Bill Boynton sparked love at first sight. Her first project, in 1991, was to lay bare even more stone. While in the process of clearing the backyard, she uncovered a lot of debris that needed to go—including cement blocks and discarded carpeting tossed during the house's initial construction—but she also revealed buried treasure: more





This photo: Sarah Boynton went natural when hunting rocks to construct the koi waterfall, foraging stones from the family's New Hampshire property. *Opposite top:* Sarah and her son, Billy, spend time beside the first pond. *Opposite below:* Pots of begonias and coleus ring the dining patio.



Above: In the front yard, Shelby, the family's Labrador retriever, guards the gully garden that was once an eyesore and is now filled with 'Rustic Orange' coleus, 'Redhead' coleus, Totally Tempted *Cuphea*, daylilies, and purple coneflower.

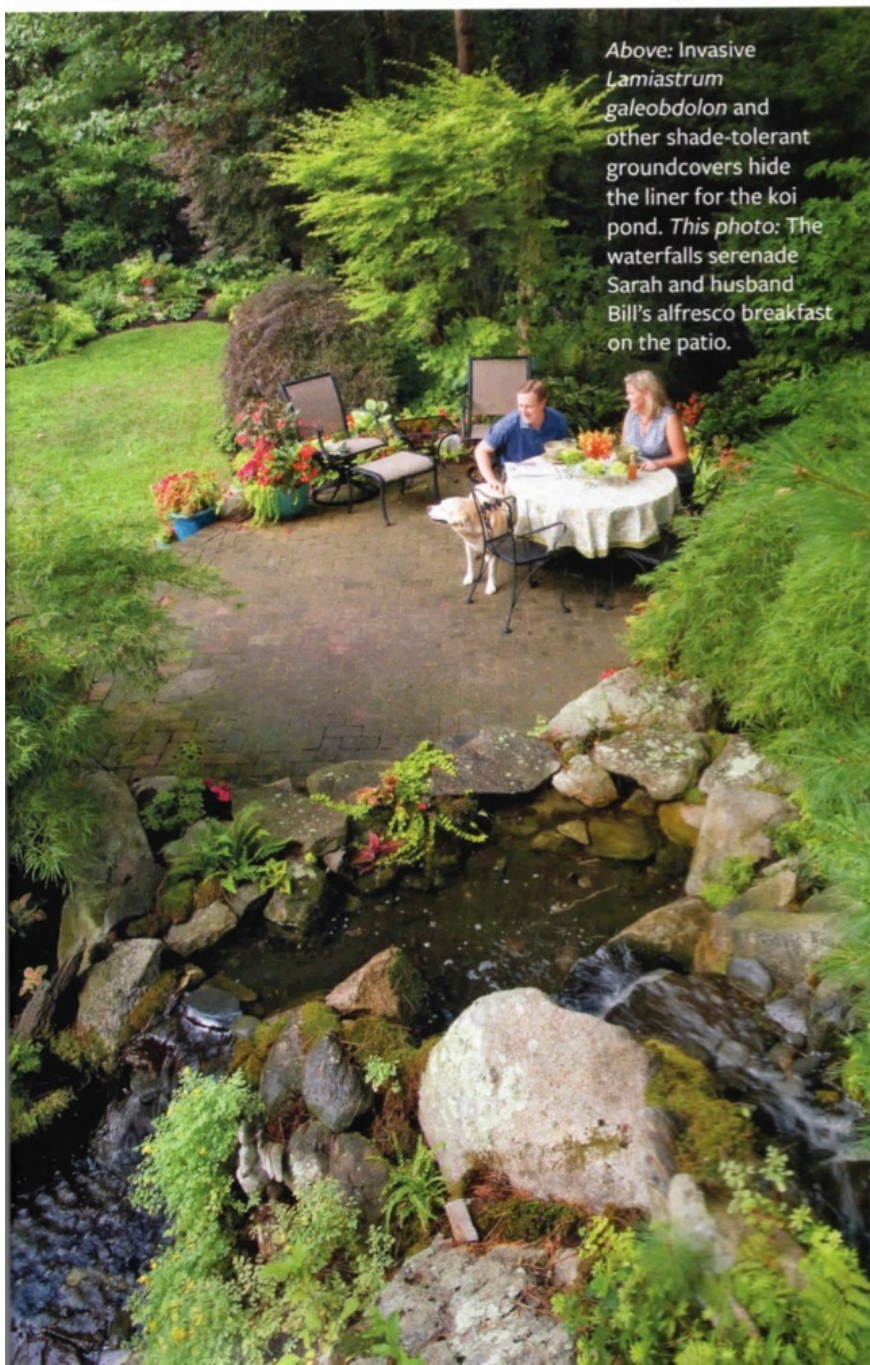
stone. Not many gardeners would be pleased to find masses of ledge hidden beneath briars and poison ivy, but Sarah was ecstatic. Still, one ingredient was missing. When her 40th birthday approached, Bill declared that a special gift was in order. "He asked what sort of jewelry I'd like," Sarah recalls. Instead, her wish was for a jewel of another kind: a backyard waterfall.

Specifically, she wanted a natural waterfall. Her goal was to match the local stone as closely as possible when constructing the water feature. The couple did so by bringing natural stones home by hand from their family's New

Hampshire vacation site. The result looks like it came with the scene. "It's very serene. It completely calms you," she says. And the Boynton family members—by that time, son Billy was born—were not the only ones to benefit. "Red cardinals, goldfinches, and other critters come to drink and bathe," she says. So five years later, when her husband repeated his birthday jewelry offer, he may have anticipated her response. She wanted a second waterfall—this time with a fishpond.

Meanwhile, Sarah was busy planting around the water features, using *The Natural Shade Garden* by Ken Druse as her reference. Before its publication, shade was perceived as a problem. Armed with lists of plants that thrive in shade, Sarah took her natural canopy and ran with it. She expanded the arboreal inventory (thanks to her willing hole-digging husband) with kousa dogwoods, cut-leaf maples, magnolias, plums, and a tricolor beech, resulting in denser shade—and more privacy. They also added a patio and dining area in the middle of the scene. "It makes you feel as if you're in the woods", she says, "and I have always loved the woods."

Discovering plants for shade was a challenge at first, but it became easier with time, as nurseries bulked up their inventory of foxgloves, ferns, hostas, heucheras, tiarellas, hakonechloas, and hydrangeas. Sarah sprinkled them in, finding slender crevices among the rocks and inserting perennials after shaking most of the soil from their roots. She also experimented with woodland plants. Trillium, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Solomon's seal, and lady's slipper love the habitat with a passion that rivals her own. The result hides the pond liners beneath ferns and other marginal plants. There were



Above: Invasive *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* and other shade-tolerant groundcovers hide the liner for the koi pond. This photo: The waterfalls serenade Sarah and husband Bill's alfresco breakfast on the patio.

How to Plant Around a Pond

If Sarah Boynton's pond looks totally natural, that's no accident. Not only did she handpick weathered rocks, but she carefully tucks in perennials bolstered by annuals to camouflage the liner. By wedging plants into crevices and letting them spill around, the pond appears to be nature's own work. Here's how she makes it all come together naturally:

Tools and Materials

- Gloves
- Compost
- Hand trowel
- Tropical ferns (*Nephrolepis* and *Asplenium nidus*)



1. Add compost to amend the soil, building up the pond's edge to disguise the liner and hold plants firmly in place.



2. Remove the fern from its container and shake excess potting soil from the roots. Where space is limited, wedge the plants into crevices and between rocks. Reducing each plant's footprint results in a natural look.



3. Using a hand trowel and taking care not to damage the liner, dig a hole and insert a fern into the hole.

4. Firm the fern into position, pulling the compost in the hole and covering the roots. Be sure to water thoroughly after planting. Keep the newly transplanted fern moist for several days immediately after transplanting.





The Garden at a Glance

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. House | 7. Large waterfall |
| 2. Koi pond | 8. Brick pathway |
| 3. Rock outcropping | 9. Driveway and parking |
| 4. Back lawn and foundation planting | 10. Front entry |
| 5. Patio | 11. Raised-bed foundation planting |
| 6. Upper pond and waterfall | 12. Steppable walkway |

some cautionary tales. For example, *Lamium galeobdolon* was a major mistake, turning from handsome groundcover into noxious weed. Painted fern also pops up everywhere, but Sarah can easily edit it down to graceful proportions.

Once a professional florist (and still fond of pulling together a phenomenal bouquet), Sarah dotes on her favorite color: chartreuse. To turn the color wheel up a notch, she sprinkles in such annuals as impatiens, begonias, coleus,

fuchsias, caladiums, and iresine. She knows just where a spark is needed, following her instinct to walk the fine line between restive and riotous.

Today, the scene is sensational. Not only does it look and feel like the rocky woodlands of Sarah's past, it sends its water music floating everywhere. When possible, the whole family leaves the windows open to listen. "We fall asleep to the sound of water," Sarah says, "and wake up to it again in the morning."

For more information, see Resources on page 109.



1



2



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4



5



6



7

1. Beside the koi pond waterfall, Sarah Boynton weaves in tropical impatiens, coleus, ferns, and colocasias to bolster perennial painted fern (*Athyrium niponicum* 'Ghost') and Japanese fountaingrass. 2. Sarah's son, Billy, and his cousin, Elizabeth, spend time outdoors. 3. When planting the upper falls, Sarah shared the work with birds who distributed *Corydalis lutea* seeds. 4. Sarah grows miniature hostas ('Pandora's Box', 'Cat's Eye', and 'Teeny-Weeny Bikini') in a shallow container in a bed of pachysandra. 5. An elegant Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Viridis') accents the edge of the patio. 6. *Caladium* 'Miss Muffet' pairs with *Heuchera* 'Obsidian'. 7. Sarah planted sagina, *Sedum* 'Ogon', veronica, and *Ajuga* 'Chocolate Chip' between the stepping-stones. 8. *Astrantia*, coleus, New Guinea impatiens, and Japanese painted fern brighten the shady pond.



8