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A kitchen addition in Atlantic Heights, a ledge garden adorned for fall dining, trends in entertaining, setting the scene for a Cape Neddick Christmas



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A rocky relationship this gardener would not change



## *Between a rock and a hard place*

Sarah Boynton did not know what she was getting into when she moved to Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1990. Besides the three large rhododendrons on the premises, the acre stretching around the house was pretty much engulfed in brambles and disguised in mystery. Who knew what was hidden under the camouflage? “I continually got poison ivy cleaning it up,” she says about her first year in residence. Nonetheless, she persisted in ripping plants out, tearing at invasives, and clearing the land around the house. Fortunately, all that hard work resulted in the reward of her dreams — she hit rock.

Other gardeners might cringe when they plunge a shovel into the ground and hear the deep, resounding thud of metal making contact with bedrock, but Sarah Boynton welcomed the discovery of her very own ledge as reason to rejoice. “It was masked in briars,” she recalls of the time previous to unearthing her diamond-in-the-rough. Indeed, the more she excavated, the more rock she uncovered — which just thrilled her beyond description. Not just little, picayune stones lay down below, and certainly not messy hardscrabble. She unearthed the strong, rough-featured face of genuine ledge for which the shoreline is famous. Some gardeners might see it as a handicap. For Boynton, one of the perks of living in a seaside community is the potential for a rocky relationship.

The secret to working successfully with a ledge is finding plants that do not demand deep soil to send down their anchors. Although Sarah Boynton did not see stone as a problem, the challenge lay in finding plants with smaller root balls

WRITTEN BY TOVAH MARTIN  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY KINDRA CLINEFF

rather than roughing up massive root systems for insertion. But that was fine with her, because she was prone to research the web and go the mail-order route at the time, seeking out novelties long before they were available locally. She would order up boxes of ferns from Fancy Fronds Nursery in Gold Bar, Washington, and tenderly wedge them into place. Why ferns? They were the obvious solution, because Sarah Boynton was given another blessing that most gardeners do not see as an asset. Her acre basks under the umbrella of trees.

Boynton's gardening friends congratulated her on her move to Hingham, but they expressed their sympathy for what they saw as a hardship at her new location. At the time, everyone wanted a yard that basked in full, blaring sun. "Shade got no respect back then," Boynton says. For her part, she could never figure out why her neighbors did not warm to their dappled canopies and end-of-season brilliant autumn foliage with the same fervor that she felt. The fact that her backyard is wooded has always been a boasting point for Boynton. Adding to the understory with Japanese maples and shrubs such as Japanese andromeda (*Pieris japonica* 'Little Heath'), oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), *Rhododendron* 'Ginny Gee', and dwarf mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia* 'Elf' and *Kalmia latifolia* 'Sarah') that enhance the color was one of her first feats when she moved in and uncovered her hidden treasure. But when the time came to insert perennials below, she faced a challenge. Besides hostas and ferns, nurseries were not well-versed with possibilities. For her inventory, she had to do some research—for inspiration and plant lists, she turned to Ken Druse's book, *The Natural Shade Garden*. That's how she ended up with her rich inventory of *Heuchera*, Solomon's seal, ginger, *Arunacus*, *Hakonechloa*, and *Actaea* (formerly *Cimicifuga*). To those perennial faithfuls, she adds begonias, coleus, and New Guinea impatiens for dots of color.

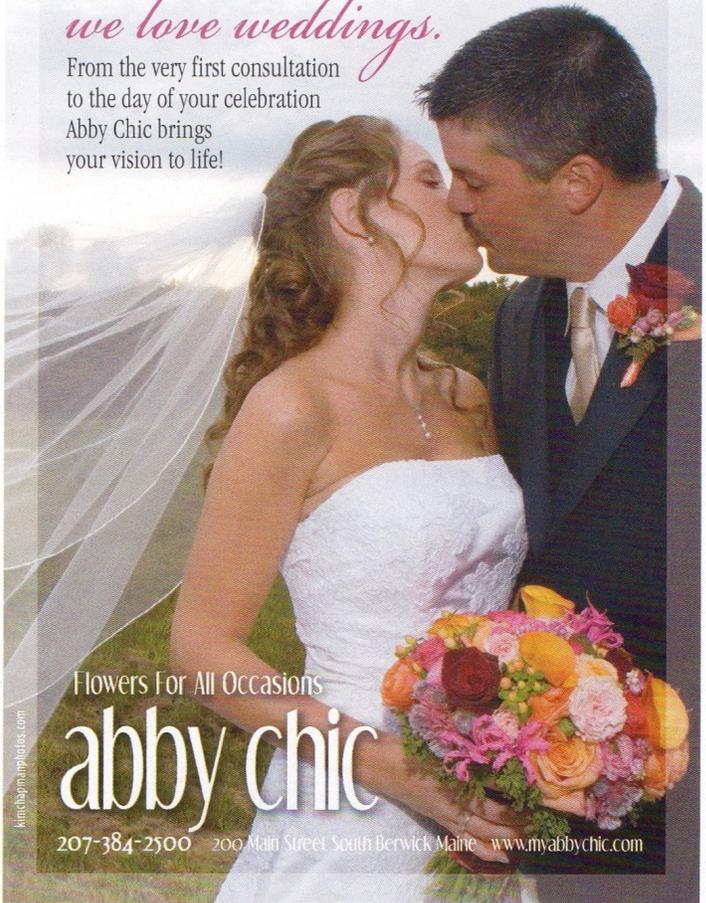
With a lot of editing and a little augmenting, Boynton's landscape began to come together. It was just missing one important element. "It was landlocked," she moaned. So, for her 40th birthday, she had a rather unique request. When her husband, Bill, asked for gift suggestions before going jewelry shopping, she steered him in an entirely different direction. She did not crave bling in the usual sense of the word, but she did yearn for a little sparkle. She wanted a waterfall.

It started when a large pine died. The loss was traumatic, but even worse was the removal process. The tree was so massive that getting the stump out ruined a chainsaw. And the gash in the land hit Boynton like an open scar—until she thought of a way to fill the gaping void gloriously. That is when she made her birthday suggestion. Being in a coastal community was not sufficient. She wanted to see—and hear—water flowing right outside her windows.

"Everybody thought I was crazy," she recalls of the reception that her idea received from most fronts. But Bill totally understood. Not only did he understand, he helped her fetch weathered, lichen-covered rocks from the family's northern New England cabin to lug home and insert into the

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Page 55, left: Not long after Sarah Boynton was gifted with the waterfall of her dreams, she added a terrace to the back patio so the family could dine serenaded by water music. | Right: The garden is always colorful, but in autumn the fiery hues above echo annuals clustered below. | This page: The upper pond and its flowing waterfall attract frogs, turtles, and birds galore that flit in the water and sun themselves on time-weathered rocks.



scene and make the waterfall feel as if it had always been in place. By inserting plants in the crevices, the waterfall that surges down just footsteps from their back windows gives the family a sense of adventure. In autumn, scattered with colorful fallen leaves, the waterfall has all the majesty and drama of a personal park.

There were further stony adventures. They built a two-tiered patio with a dining alcove where they eat breakfast and dinner near the garden that Boynton continually hones. Planters are updated in autumn to reflect the season, rivaling the foliar festivities all around. Ornamental peppers, mums, asters, and autumn-blooming plants fill containers stationed by coleus and begonias that keep performing in the surrounding gardens.

But even that was not enough for the outdoor-centric family. Five years after the first waterfall, Sarah again refused jewelry for her birthday and asked for another pond. Filled with fish and nestled in plants, the new pond enhances the waterside experience from all angles.

Meanwhile, further rock was unearthed when the family added a room to the footprint of the house. Boynton embraced the massive ledge that was suddenly visible and added plants along the stone path between the building and the ledge. She experimented with filler plants that merge the walkway with the rest of the garden. A little creative experimentation has led to an inventory of creepers like *Sagina*, *Ajuga* 'Chocolate Chip', *Sedum makinoi* 'Ogon', *Corydalis lutea*, dianthus, creeping thyme, and sea thrift (*Armeria*) that fill the niche with color and winter successfully.

Happenings went on elsewhere as well. In the sunny front of the house, a colorful flower garden, filled with echinacea, ligularia, perovskia, and other late-season performers that tolerate hard-to-mow terrain, spills down a slope toward the street. Meanwhile, the resident tree-hugger is adding woody plants to the front of her home in hopes that someday that area will be canopied in more of the shade she adores.

At this Hingham home, the garden peaks in autumn when the trees change hues, their brilliant tints echoed in pumpkins and gourds staged at strategic junctures. For Boynton, there has never been anything hard about stone or any of the other natural blessings on her property. ■

FOR A LIST OF SOURCES, SEE PAGE 111

Facing page, clockwise from upper left: When Sarah Boynton sees a table, the floral designer immediately goes into arranging mode. Not only is the centerpiece stacked with sunflowers and wheat, but gourds, pomegranates, and rosehips are scattered around. | Boynton adds mums, gourds, and pumpkins to the mix, playing up the season. | Although the Japanese maples are riveting throughout the year, come fall *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Viridis' and *A. palmatum* var. *dissectum* 'Seiryu' are on fire around the dining patio.



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