

Garden Sages/Marge Hols

The fine art of borrowing good ideas

Ever since I listened to British designer Andrew Sankey's delightful lecture on garden design last September at the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, I've been toying with the idea of redesigning my main backyard garden.

Andrew builds long walks to lead visitors through his garden and punctuates the end of each walk with a statue, urn, gate or bench--what he calls a "vista closer." It's a time-honored, appealing device and I want to try it.

My plan is to extend the short bluestone entry walk straight through my garden to a focal point in front of the azaleas and old brick wall. That would make it possible for visitors to view plant combos without getting tangled in drifts of hardy geraniums and forget-me-nots. It also would accomplish what must be my main objective this year: making the garden easier to care for with my arthritic hands.

This could be fun! Out with the aggressive bee balm, floppy Siberian iris and mildew-prone phlox. Out with the Asiatic lilies and gay feather, both magnets for my resident rabbits. In with lots more front-of-the-border plants with interesting forms and foliage to flank the new walk.

I could plant perennials with silver foliage. I love fuzzy lamb's ears, 'Firewitch' *Dianthus*, 'Blue Wonder' catmint and spiky blue oat grass. The idea is to repeat them at staggered points along each side of the walk.



Scott Endres' garden path

I could mix in dwarf lady's mantle for its chartreuse flowers and foliage, a creepy red-leafed sedum like 'Dragon's Blood', and dwarf zinnias, mini-petunias and dwarf *Angelonias* for color.

Or, maybe I'll experiment. I've been dying to try the eclectic mix Tangletown Gardens co-owner Scott Endres uses ever since our club visited his Ramsey Hill garden.

Scott repeats plant forms, colors and textures. Along his stone walk are four kinds of dark red-leafed plants--a trailing coleus leads to a dark sedum that leads to the same coleus down the way, but then to a taller coleus beyond. Silver sage, kale, a low golden juniper and variegated iris provide contrasts. An accent of orange flowers comes from a variegated flowering maple.

Finding the perfect "vista closer" will be a challenge. Garden centers offer a huge array of statues--fairies, gargoyles, gnomes-- but none "speaks" to me. A tall antique metal urn planted with annuals could be spectacular; but I'd have to drag a hose through the garden to water it every few days. So a bench it is. I'm leaning toward a small granite one.