

# FIND YOUR *Style*

Unique flowerbed ideas to make your home look great

By Dee A. Nash

**T**he landscape surrounding your house tells a story. Your front yard is your welcome mat while your backyard weaves a tale about the sort of gardener you are, or want to be. Do you love to deadhead and weed a cottage garden, do you want to eat fresh vegetables and fruit, or are you a minimalist who favors easy-care shrubs and trees? Whatever your style, these are questions everyone should ask before digging that first hole to plant a tree, or building raised beds.



## WANT MORE BIRDSONG? USE NATIVE PLANTS AROUND YOUR HOME

In the past, gardeners kept landscapes trim, formal, and green with a manicured lawn out front, but times are changing. Native shrubs and trees can do double duty – attracting beneficial insects while beautifying your landscape. They also add essential layers to the landscape for birds and other small creatures that call our gardens home.

According to Doug Tallamy, coauthor of *The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden*, home landscapes and gardens in urban and suburban areas are the best hope for birds and their young especially in spring. By planting native trees and shrubs, you're not only beautifying your home, you're also helping pollinators and birds.

To start, plant small attractive trees, such as spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), in partial to full shade and shrubs like American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) in full or part sun. Then join the Oklahoma Native Plant Society or an online native plant group to learn more.

## ADD EDIBLE PLANTS TO AN EXISTING BED OR BORDER

It's fine to incorporate fruit, vegetables, and herbs into the landscape too. In fact, the process of integrating edible plants into



▲ A variety of herbs and flowers frame this front garden border. At its center is a circular bed that could be planted with tomatoes or bush beans in summer. Surrounding the bed is a gravel path to unite the space.

**Top:** This Oklahoma City home graciously welcomes fall with pumpkins piled up on its wide front porch. Everyone is grateful for cooler fall weather after summer heat and pumpkins are a signal that brightly colored fall leaves and hot cider can't be far behind.



ornamental landscapes was first championed by Rosalind Creasy more than 25 years ago in her book, *Edible Landscaping*. The torch was then taken up by other authors, including Brie Arthur who wrote *The Foodscape Revolution: Finding a Better Way to Make Space for Food and Beauty in Your Garden* last year. The easiest way to begin integrating food into your landscape is by edging borders with attractive herbs such as rosemary (*Rosmarinus* spp.), lavender (*Lavandula* spp.), or basil (*Ocimum* spp.). Plant creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*) between the flagstones of a walkway.

Begin by learning which herbs are hardy, marginally hardy, and annual. Then incorporate these attractive plants into your landscape as you would shorter tropical or annual color plants. Plant edible flowers, such as pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) or nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) for spring blooms, or borage (*Borago officinalis*) in the summer garden. As you become more confident, you can tuck tomato plants staked with attractive, colorful cages, or beautiful vegetables, like eggplant, into your borders.



▲ A cottage-style garden is an informal way to enhance the beauty of your home, especially if your home isn't formal. Note that the roof and shutters are reflected in the gardener's choice of blooming flowers.

➤ As a flowering specimen shrub, 'Jane' deciduous magnolia (*M. x 'Jane'*) can't be beat. It is the centerpiece of the author's front border. *Narcissus* and tulips (*Tulipa*) enhance the area in the spring.

Top: Indian blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*) and other native flowers, including purple coneflower and various black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta* cvs.), invite pollinators to feast upon the nectar and pollen.



#### INTEGRATE LONG-BLOOMING PERENNIALS AND BRIGHT ANNUALS

Oklahoma's long summer and fall require strong color to stand up to the sun. Opt for brightly colored annuals and long bloomers to fill in any gaps. Autumn sage (*Salvia greggii*), *Zinnia*, perennial tall phlox (*P. paniculata*), other *Salvia*, and purple coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*) – like the Cheyenne Spirit series – are all great choices for a beautiful mixed border full of color and pollinator-friendly blooms.

By planting these long-and-strong bloomers, you'll have plenty of butterflies to show your children and grandchildren, or your neighbors' children. Why does that matter? There's an increasing worry that young children are becoming "nature blind" due to overuse of technology. Have the next generation help you plant some butterfly-friendly plants in spring and later show them how much both butterflies and blooms add to the beauty of your home. Teach children that bees and even wasps won't hurt them in the garden. They only sting if you're close to their nests, or accidentally grasp them in your hand.



This gardener lined her shaded sidewalk entrance with bigleaf hydrangeas (*H. macrophylla*) to add color to an otherwise green space with Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra*) and larger shrubs.

▼ This small urban garden makes full use of its space by planting every square inch, even vertical space with hanging baskets of Boston ferns (*Nephrolepis exaltata*). Rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*) anchors the left side of the garden, while black-eyed Susan flowers throughout.



### USE TEXTURE AND FOLIAGE COLOR FOR VISUAL INTEREST

Oklahoma has long, hot summers. Many flowers, such as roses (*Rosa* spp.), bloom in spring and then take a long break before flowering again in the fall. You'll need both texture and colorful foliage to carry the garden through the hot and dry months.

And don't forget to water. More Oklahoma landscapes succumb to lack of water than anything else. Use drip irrigation or soaker hoses to direct necessary water right to plant roots without waste.

Speaking of colorful and textured foliage, I finally found a coral bells (*Heuchera*) cultivar that stands up to Oklahoma's heat and cold: 'Dark Secret'. My two plants came back bigger and better this spring than the year before, even after a couple of late freezes. 'Palace Purple' is still a old standby, but 'Dark Secret' is darker and more vigorous.

Another great plant that adds color and texture is 'Royal Purple' smoketree (*Cotinus coggryia* 'Royal Purple'). If you want to maintain it as a medium-sized shrub, cut it back to the size you want in early spring. Otherwise, it will grow into a tree. Cutting it back won't hurt it, but it may not bloom.

Don't forget about using variegated foliage to enliven a shady area. Try 'Kogane Mushi' Japanese false nettle (*Boehmeria nipononivea* 'Kogane Mushi'), which reliably returns to my garden year after year.



▲ Even a driveway can be a relaxing spot in summer if you don't have another spot for a table and chairs. Here, the gardener surrounded her patio set with large containers to create privacy.

### PROVIDE SEATING AREAS OUTSIDE

Before homes had air conditioning, they had spacious front porches where people would sit outside on warm evenings. Recapture that nostalgic feeling by creating a spot outside where you can sit and enjoy the evening or summer mornings.

Install a flagstone, brick, or cobblestone patio and place a table and chairs or a bench with pillows for comfortable seating in the front or backyard. It's also a great place to rest occasionally while gardening. In the backyard on a covered patio or deck, string cafe lights to create ambiance. You can often find outdoor furniture online or at garage sales. With a little spray paint and some new cushions, you can create a haven. Don't forget containers of plants and scented flowers to enhance your space. Scented *Geranium*, *Petunias*, *Gardenia*, lavender (Spanish or English), jasmine (*Jasminum* spp.), and roses are all good choices.

### USE DECOR TO MARK A CHANGE IN SEASONS

Plant spring-blooming bulbs in the fall for borders full of color throughout spring. Pile pumpkins on your porch or around containers at entryway to mark the change of seasons. Afterward, add the pumpkins to your compost pile rather than in the trash.

Hopefully these ideas will give you a jump-start or inspiration so that you can have a garden you'll enjoy and will enhance the beauty of your home. ♡

Dee Nash is a native Oklahoman and the author of *The 20-30 Something Garden Guide, A No-Fuss, Down and Dirty Gardening 101 For Anyone Who Want To Grow Stuff*. She lives on 7.5 acres between the Great American Prairie and the beginning of the deciduous forest. She gardens on approximately 1½ acre and grows vegetables, fruit, roses, daylilies, native plants, and other favorites.