

Chicagoland GARDENING

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Follow the Curving Lines

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Two teardrop-shaped turf areas provide visual fluidity to a small backyard design. Add in vibrant garden beds and the trip to the garage becomes a stroll with a sense of destination.



Opposite Page: The Hallen house and garage were built seven years ago. The garden links the two structures with its curving lines and repetition of key colors. Above: The view towards the rear of the house is now somewhat changed due to the removal of the large but dying ash shown in the photo. A new disease-resistant elm was planted in its stead. (See sidebar page 55).

As North Shore gardens go, it's relatively small. But the Hallen garden packs a big punch with vibrant color, variety, and impeccable maintenance. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find a garden anywhere with more immediate visual impact, thanks to its abundance of long-flowering annuals and perennials, surrounded by a varied collection of mature conifers and trees.

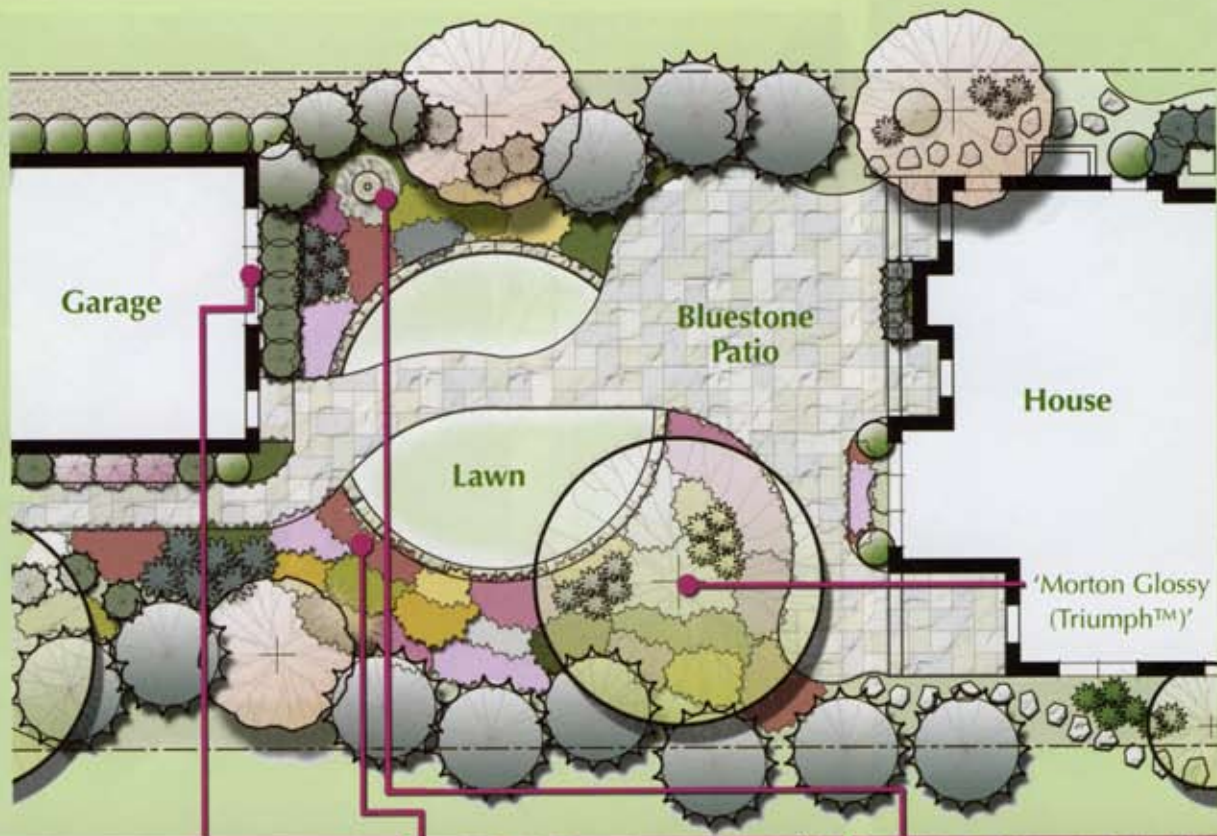
Owners Christian and Valerie Hallen have lived on the property since their traditional white stucco house with dark green trim was built seven years ago. At their previous home Valerie also had a garden, one that she describes as "nice," but adds, "For a garden such as this, you need professional help."

To design the garden and bring it to its current state of perfection, the Hallens contracted with Van Zelst, Inc. in Wadsworth. The work was done three years ago, with additions and adjustments continuing as needed.

As Valerie Hallen explains, a major factor governing the design of the quarter-acre lot was the garage, a separate structure at the rear of the yard that reflects the style of the house with its gabled roof, windows and window box billowing with blooms. (Very reminiscent of the Irish cottage in the John Wayne/Maureen O'Hara movie "The Quiet Man," she says.) And because the family's approach to the house most often starts at the garage, the Hallens wanted the passage between

the two buildings to be alive with color, drama and a sense of destination. Indeed, when viewing the garden, it's useful to see it from two vantage points: the garage as well as the house. Each offers its own focal points and moments of splendor.

As David Van Zelst, landscape architect and president of Van Zelst, Inc., set out to configure the space, one of his most important decisions was how to treat the bluestone patio and the walkway leading to the garage. Hardscape decisions naturally come first. But in this case one might argue that the ramifications of how he decided to treat the lawn were even more far-reaching. He could have done the usual, drawing a circle, square or



Top: The design plan demonstrates how the two free-standing sections of lawn actually form a perfect circle. Left: Large window boxes on both the house and garage are special details that add interest to the finished garden. Center: The annual cleome is part of an alternating rhythm of plant heights and colors seen throughout the garden. Right: Dark stones placed around a millstone fountain help it blend naturally with the garden.

rectangle and dropping it smack dab in the middle of the 52- by 48-foot space between the house and garage. Instead, he designed two elliptical shapes that he positioned on either side of the curving walkway, but not as a matched pair—a subtle move that adds both fluidity and balance to the design. Stone blocks set flush with the ground outline the lawn areas along their outside edges and further define the space.

Surrounding the grass is a colorful medley of flowers in shades of pink, blue, yellow and white, as specified by Valerie Hallen who calls the garden “a gift from my husband because he knows how much I like

flowers.” This year’s display began with a handsome mound of pink and white impatiens that led to blue ageratum, pink fibrous begonias, tall pink cleome, deep rose geraniums, some spots of yellow with ‘Goldsturm’ rudbeckia echoed by the diminutive Dahlberg daisy, then another tall accent, this time from white cleome. Interspersed among the annuals were clumps of ‘Halcyon’ hosta whose blue-green leaves blended pleasingly with the color scheme. Overall there was a satisfying rhythm of changing yet recurrent color. It’s striking to realize just how little lawn was needed to set off this floral display. Lawn is a vital

component in a garden design, but it doesn’t have to be huge.

In a sense, everything this garden has to offer can be seen in one fell swoop when standing at the back door. Yet, surprisingly, there are niches to be discovered and accents that only register in one’s consciousness with a second—or third—look. For example, there’s the witch hazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*) espaliered on the brick chimney, fronted by pink impatiens and boxwood (*Buxus* ‘Green Velvet’). Then, a few feet to the right, a large wooden window box of rosy-red geraniums, yellow lantana and trailing vinca vine hovers over a row of pink *Astilbe*

chinensis 'Pumila' that's flanked by a pair of *Viburnum carlesii* 'Compactum'.

And in the corner by the garage, a low contemporary fountain adds a "just right" focal point to an area that would have been perfectly okay without it but is now so much more interesting. Little touches can have a big impact.

Probably most homeowners consult professionals because of their design ability, but sometimes it's their technical expertise that makes hiring a pro worth every penny. In the Hallens' case, there was a drainage problem with water flowing into their yard from the properties next door. "The drainage was redone twice. When Dave oversaw the work, he got it right," recalls Valerie.

Another issue, one that must have seemed overwhelming at first, was the mature ash that was dying because the house builder had severed its roots during construction seven years earlier. There was no easy access to the yard to remove the dying tree, and any replacement the Hallens might be able to plant themselves would take 10 to 20 years to achieve a real visual presence in the yard or provide significant shade. Such a situation definitely called for a professional with 1) the judgment to choose the right tree and 2) access to the necessary heavy equipment. Van Zelst selected Triumph™

elm (*Ulmus* x 'Morton Glossy'), one of the new elm hybrids resistant to Dutch elm disease that have been developed at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle. Both the tree removal and replanting were completed on a single day last fall. The elm, now settled in and thriving, joined an already sizable collection of woody plants. The builder had lined the lot with several spruces, now at least 15 feet tall, to which Van Zelst added Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*), 'Techny' arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Techny'), compact burning bush (*Euonymus alatus* 'Compactum') and dwarf Koreanspice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii* 'Compactum'). As a result, the Hallens now enjoy an almost totally private rear yard that even the inevitable deer hasn't been able to destroy—although last spring one big-antlered guy did come every day to eat all the tulips in the backyard, but not the daffodils or grape hyacinths. Valerie found him fascinating, a sentiment that might have been different had he gone after their trees. ("If there's anything we believe in, it's trees," she proclaims.)

But having a garden is always a matter of adjusting to change whether it originates with weather, deer, drainage problems, or dying trees. Valerie Hallen sees good in it all. "It's beautiful out here, even in winter," she says. 🌱

Elm Replacements

Suppose you've just lost an elm to Dutch elm disease and you really, really, really want to replace it with another elm. Is there any hope?

Lucky you. There are now five hybrid elms that have been developed at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle as part of its Elm Replacement Program under the directorship of Dr. George Ware. They are Commendation™, Danada Charm™, Vanguard™, Accolade™ and Triumph™. For several years Dr. Ware has been working with Asian species that resemble the much-loved American elm but without the American tree's vulnerability to Dutch elm disease and other problems.

The Triumph™ elm selected by David Van Zelst for the Hallen garden is a controlled cross between Vanguard™ and Accolade™. Triumph features lustrous, dark green foliage, a good upright form, strong branching, and excellent disease and pest resistance. Field growers appreciate Triumph's shape because it is much easier to train as a young plant than other varieties. All five elms have been either fully released to the market or released in a limited capacity.

A Triumph-ant Move



A major upheaval occurred in the Hallen garden last fall when a mature ash, whose roots had been severed during the house construction process, began to die and needed to be removed. As a replacement, David Van Zelst selected Triumph™ elm (*Ulmus* x 'Morton Glossy'), one of the introductions from The Morton Arboretum's Elm Improvement Program. Triumph™ elm is a hybrid derived from Asian species that can grow in a wide range of climates and boasts resistance to three serious elm problems—Dutch elm disease, elm yellows, and elm leaf beetle. Triumph™ elm will ultimately grow 50 to 60 feet tall and spread its softly arching branches 40 to 50 feet wide.

The work of removing the old tree and bringing in the new one took just one day but involved considerable coordination beforehand with the nursery that grew the new tree, the trucking firm that hauled it to the site, and the crane rigging crews that maneuvered the booms. Since the crane operator was in the alley behind the garage and therefore unable to see the very large placement hole that had been dug, he had to follow radio instructions from a spotter inside the yard as he lifted out the old tree and then hoisted in the new elm, a 10-inch caliper tree that weighed around seven tons. He made it with inches to spare, prompting Val Zelst to quip, "The tree took off and landed on schedule."

The elm came through last winter in fine fettle, leafed out well in spring and thrived through the summer in its new home—almost, says Valerie Hallen, as if there were magic in the soil.