

Garden 4:

Collector's Cottage Garden

The house was built in the late 30's, early '40s by a father-and-son team. It was one of several houses built along the end of Love Lane to house ranch workers, and like all of them it was small – 2 bedrooms, one bath and 1100 square feet. It was owned for many years by the librarian at San Ramon Valley High School, and we bought it in 1987. We were the youngest couple in the neighborhood when we moved in. Now we're one of the oldest.

The newest garden on the property is the front garden, with two sections on either side of the house. It was just completed last year by Bill Williams and Spirit

Space Design. At that time there were lawns on both sides of the driveway, and we decided it was time to remove them. We gave Bill the theme of a dry creek bed, and he worked his magic from there. The larger rocks and boulders – white sandstone and turquoise – were set by Bill's team using a wooden tripod and block-and-tackle crane system that the ancient romans used a few thousand years ago, proving that great techniques are timeless.

For plantings, we wanted to continue the theme that we used when we created the north garden two years ago: a collector's cottage garden, with a variety of plant types, size and textures, with color that would be year-round and wouldn't rely on seasonal flowering. Much of the color is from evergreen foliage – as from different varieties of *Huchera*, *Loripetalum*, and variegated plants. Since it is unfenced, the front also needed to be reasonably deer-proof as well.



We kept some heritage plants in the front, notably the large birch, the Glen 40 camellia up against the garage, and the two red Japanese maples on either side of the walkway. We also decided to keep the serpentine boxwood hedge that bordered the old lawn, as a contrast to the naturalistic plantings around the creek bed. The entire garden is watered with dripline.

Through the gate in the northern end of the front yard is the piece of the property we used to call the "Back Forty", because until two years ago, it was nothing but dirt, a tool shed, and the large Valley Oak trees. During the COVID shut-

down, we even let the neighborhood kids build a bike track in it, complete with jumps, hill climbs and banked turns. Bill created planting beds on the slope with tiers built with moss rock walls, a central island bed, and two planter boxes for vegetables and herbs. The large boulders on the hill and the island bed are a focal base, with plant highlights that include a weeping blue atlas cedar, weeping cherry near the steps, 4 varieties of dogwood including the evergreen "Mountain Moon", three varieties of Japanese maple highlighted by the yellow-leaved "Autumn Moon", and a Cecil Brunner climbing rose growing against the back fence. Of course, the three towering valley oaks along the fence line are a major highlight, and when up-lighted at night they are spectacular. A yellow Lady Banks Rose in the middle of a circular flagstone patio marks the border of the "Back Forty".



Both the front garden and the Back Forty are young, still filling out, and are watered entirely with drip-line. It is notable that the Back Forty and new front garden together use less water than just the front garden alone did when we had the lawn sections watered with normal sprinklers.

Before passing the Lady Banks rose into the back garden, there are two camellias next to the house. The one on the left is called “Ruta Hagmann”, and was hybridized by David Hagmann, and grower in Lafayette, who named it after his wife. Next to it is a “Lemon Drop” camellia, one of the few camellias with flowers that have a yellow caste. The back and south

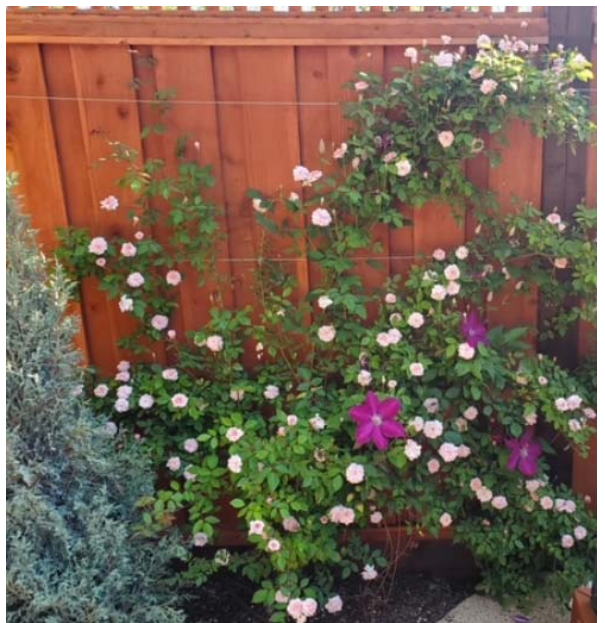
sections are legacy gardens...meaning they were mostly planted when we moved in 30 years ago and have not been changed much since then.

They are our next projects! As you enter the back garden you pass under a large, very old Arbutus Unedo (“Strawberry Tree”). Under the Arbutus is also a “Bloodgood” Japanese maple, and to the left of the lawn are two “Crimson Queen” japanese maples. In the middle of the lawn is a Star Magnolia.

There are a few camellias in this section that were saved from when I grew camellias for competitions. In the back left corner growing together are “Curtain Call”, “Moonlight Bay” and “Larry Piet” (named for the So Cal grower Larry Piet who created it). All produce large flowers that have won many a trophy. There is also a “Royal Velvet” planted next to the path. It produces very large, blood red flowers with bright yellow centers.

The large green-leaved Japanese maples near the arbor were planted in the late 80’s from seedlings raised by our next-door neighbor. Variety unknown.

The highlight in the south yard is growing on the arbor over the patio. It is a very old Japanese Wisteria Floribunda. Our guess is it is 60-70 years old. But its superpower is that the flowers it produces (called racemes) can grow to up to 4’ long, sometimes so long they touch the top of the table under the arbor.



To the left of the gate back to the driveway is a white Chinese Wisteria that is much younger than the floribunda. But another notable plant is a small grapevine on a trellis growing up the well house next to the gate. It is a Mission Grape, from a cutting from the “Vina Madre” vine at the San Gabriel Mission in southern California – the oldest living grapevine in California.