

Wild at heart

This Long Island garden in New York State, with its mix of wild and precise planting, challenges established ideas about plant hardiness

WORDS DANIEL J HINKLEY PHOTOGRAPHS CLAIRE TAKACS



In brief

Name The Gardens at Landcraft.

What An imaginative and creative plant-driven garden, using a vast palette of hardy and tropical species.

Where Mattituck, New York State, USA

Size Three acres.

Soil Rich loamy clay over sand, pH6.7.

Climate Warm and humid summers, very cold winters.

Hardiness rating USDA 6.



This page Between *Carpinus betulus* hedging, which encloses colour-themed areas, a narrow path is softened with *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora', underplanted with *Salvia* 'Wendy's Wish' and *Imperata cylindrica* 'Red Baron'.

Facing page Around the sunken folly, the plum-coloured blades of *Pennisetum Vertigo* (= 'Tift-8') and soft pink of *Chrysanthemum* 'Sheffield' create a cool contrast with the blue-green of selected sedums and *Lavandula x intermedia* Phenomenal (= 'Niko').



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Clipped *Buxus sempervirens* frame the hot borders, which include the bright-red *Salvia splendens* 'Van-Houttei' and two exotic cannas – 'Phasion' and 'Striata' – with their giant leaves and imposing orange flowers.



Garden creators, Dennis Schrader, left, and Bill Smith.

Although it may be considered an oversimplification by some, I find that gardens generally fit one of two moulds. There are those that have been designed to be admired from their perimeter, as if peering into a diorama. And there are those, more satisfying in my mind, that are meant to be experienced from within. One, the sterile reception room with furniture not intended for sitting and the other, the cosy den with overstuffed chairs and a friendly inventory of oft-used artefacts.

The complex and elaborately planted garden of Dennis Schrader and Bill Smith fits within the parameters of the latter. Found within 17 acres of the fertile northeastern shore of New York's Long Island. It is a precise and painterly garden, where a romantic wash of Monet collides with an exotic Gauguin.

From the entrance to the three-acre garden, with its knot garden and terraces that present hundreds of containers, which can be replanted up to five times a year, the garden becomes more relaxed in style the further you venture from the house, until it blends seamlessly into the surrounding agricultural land. "My design intent changes with each specific area of the garden," says Dennis. "Overall I like to have more manicured and heavily designed areas close to the house. Moving away from the house the garden is more relaxed and less specialised."

Relatively close to the terraces, but mostly hidden by jungly mixed borders focusing on bold foliage evocative of the tropics – bananas, cannas, palms, colocasias, tetrapanax – is the garden's social hub: the Tiki Hut. Many of the plants that surround this pavilion – indeed tender species throughout the garden – are relocated to heated quarters during the winter months when temperatures can plummet to -18°C or below.

It is through this process of experimentation with tropicals and unusual annuals and perennials that the pair have illuminated the inherent hardiness of many plant species believed inappropriate for the region, especially if micro-sited. *Eucomis* species, for example, thrive in raised beds adjacent to the house, where they are given extra sharp drainage. The duo



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In autumn the *Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta' is a blaze of orange-red foliage with red clusters of fruit, while beneath *Amsonia hubrichtii* transitions from green to a rich butterscotch.



A pavilion known as the Tiki Hut, is nestled among trees, shrubs and perennials, including *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora', and seedheads of *Lilium formosanum*.

Clockwise from top left

A bench beneath a pair of *Betula nigra*, looks out on to soft autumn planting, including the plumes of *Pennisetum villosum* and bold, red flowers of *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Firetail'.

Surrounded by drifts of grasses, including *Sporobolus heterolepis* and *Stipa tenuissima*, is Dennis and Bill's latest installation – a sunken stone folly, with a roof tapestry of assorted sedum.

The winding path to an Adirondack chair is lined by a rich mix of textures and colours from the light and airy *Pennisetum villosum* to the darker *Juniperus communis* and the erect lines of *Juncus effusus*.

The diaphanous flowers of *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *arundinacea* 'Skyracer' rise above its foliage and the surrounding *Echinacea* seedheads.

▷ remind us that paying no attention to conventional wisdom is no enemy to a creative garden.

From the Tiki Hut, you are led through a pensively planted double border of sublime colours and textures with a reliance on grasses, in particular *Stipa tenuissima* and *Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra', to a series of areas hedged by clipped hornbeam that hold the spaces together throughout the seasons. Each is reconfigured on a yearly basis, and each ringing significantly different from the next.

Pools with interconnecting rills are the connective thread between two of the areas that are negative images of each other: in one burgundy *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Cloak' and *Catalpa x erubescens* 'Purpurea' in the other golden *Cotinus coggygria* Golden Spirit (= 'Ancot') and *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea', both accentuated with grasses, perennials and annuals that join the play of colour co-ordination.

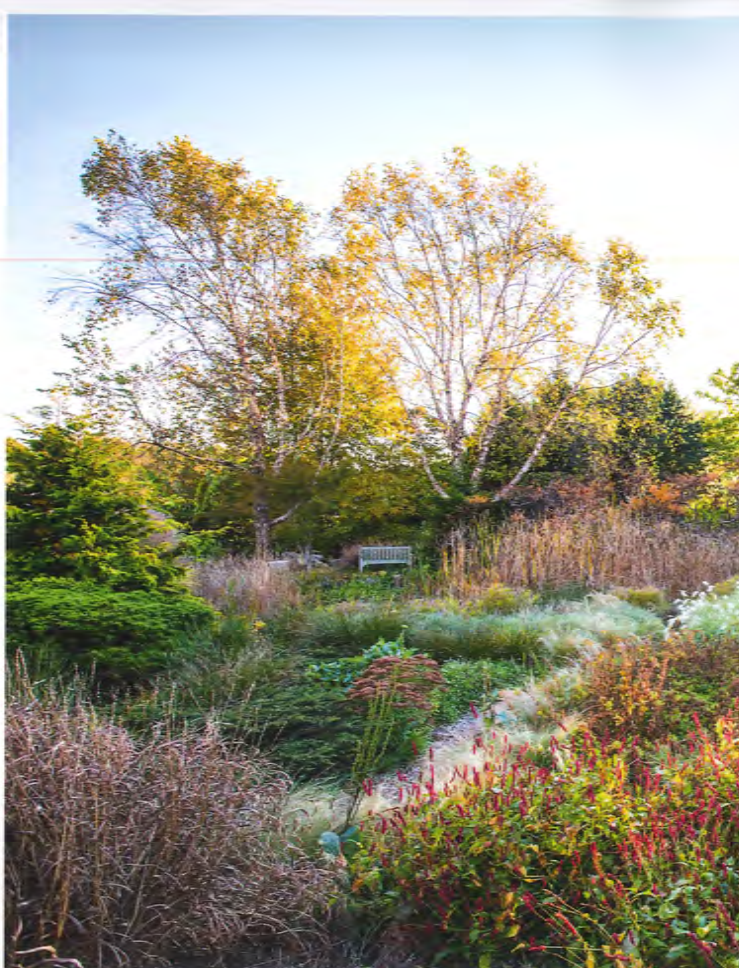
Beyond the more rigidly designed gardens is a 12-acre managed meadow where the couple have erected a nesting platform that was readily accepted by a pair of ospreys. Now, on a yearly basis, they can witness the nest building and rearing of young, adding yet another layer of entertainment to a garden that already possesses a certain surfeit.

"We have different destinations within the garden and some of these areas are more intensely planted to provide a deeper, more enhanced experience of the space. The intent in these areas is to have a natural, relaxed, more fluid look," says Dennis.

This deliberate transition from formal to wild may have been interrupted by their latest installation, a stone folly sunk into the ground like the foundations of ancient ruin. It's surrounded by a slight rise possessing a congregate of grasses, hardy opuntias and self-seeding verbascums. There are only a handful of contemporary gardens in North America where craft and passion have collided with such force and precision as here, and I leave with inspiration heavily marbled in envy. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about Dennis and Bill's wholesale nursery, Landcraft Environments, which specialises in tropicals, tender perennials and unusual annuals, at landcraftenvironment.com



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of Dennis and Bill's key plants

1 *Agastache* 'Apricot Sunrise'

Drought-tolerant, short-lived perennial that needs full sun and well-drained soils. 1m. USDA 6a-9b.

2 *Digitalis x valinii* 'Berry Canary'

Provides a long display of zesty blossoms on tall stems. Treated here as an annual. 1.2m. USDA 9a-10b.

3 *Jasminum officinale* Fiona Sunrise (= 'Frojas')

Offers fragrant, white flowers, although it is possibly most useful in lending its chartreuse foliage to the scene. 6m. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 7a-11.

4 *Viburnum dilatatum* 'Michael Dodge'

Golden berries follow white summer flowers, adding depth to the autumn garden and food for birds when fully ripened. 3m. USDA 5a-8b.

5 *Persicaria amplexicaulis* 'Firetail'

Non-stop performance from June to October makes this *Persicaria* indispensable. 1.2m. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.

6 *Pennisetum villosum*

A deciduous grass with soft plumes of white awns from late summer to autumn. Likes full sun in well-drained soils. 60cm. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 5a-9b.

7 *Phygellus x rectus* 'Moonraker'

The stoloniferous growth of this South African shrub adds an air of serendipity with erect stems clad with soft-yellow, tubular flowers throughout summer and autumn. 1.2m. RHS H5, USDA 7a-11.

8 *Nicotiana langsdorffii*

Self-seeds liberally but easily edited, adding a late-summer and autumn dash of greenish yellow flowers. Needs full sun. 1.5m. AGM. RHS H2, USDA 9a-10b.

9 *Salvia splendens* 'Van-Houttei'

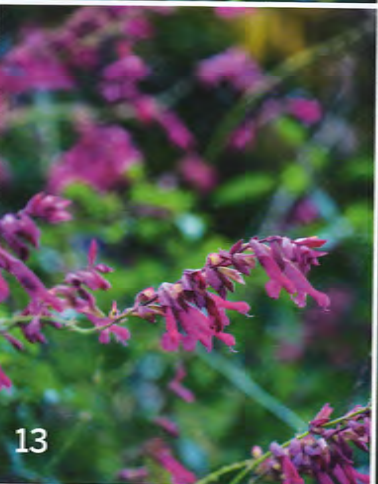
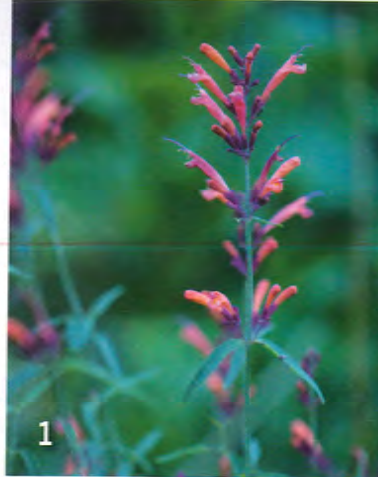
variegated A tender annual that adds vibrancy with both its variegated foliage and scarlet flowers. Most intense in full sun. 1.2m. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 9a-11.

10 *Agastache* 'Summer Glow'

Months of colour and fragrant foliage. Grown at Landcraft as an annual or short-lived perennial. 70cm. RHS H3, USDA 6a-9b.

11 *Chrysanthemum* 'Sheffield'

A classic garden chrysanthemum that is long lasting and looks sensational in late summer and early autumn. 90cm. USDA 6a-9b.





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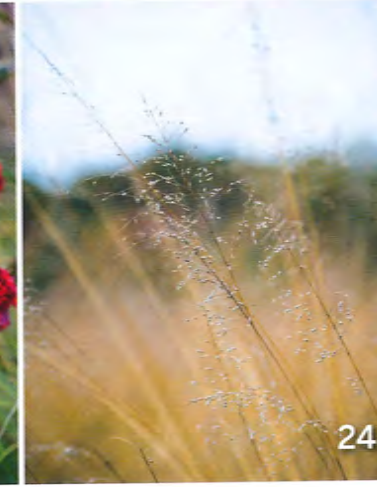
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12 *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora'

A classic selection even though there are many newer cultivars. Full sun or light shade. 4m. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

13 *Salvia* 'Wendy's Wish'

Liberally self-seeds, with an astoundingly long display of purple flowers throughout summer and autumn. 1m. USDA 9b-10b.

14 *Eustachys distichophylla*

Mid-sized grass grown for its pendulous heads of seeds. Needs full sun and well-drained soil. 70cm.

15 *Melinis nervigulmis* 'Savannah Ruby'

A grass admired for its pink flowers above curled, thin, blue-green foliage. 30cm. USDA 8a-11.

16 *Euphorbia characias* 'Glacier Blue'

A superb, variegated selection with powder-blue, evergreen foliage. Needs full sun and well-drained soils. 60cm. USDA 7a-9b.

17 *Chloris virgata*

A graceful grass grown for its late and flowers and seedheads. 50cm.

18 *Lilium formosanum*

From Taiwan, will blossom in a single year from seed and will liberally self-seed throughout the garden. 2m. USDA 5a-8b.

19 *Salvia* 'Amistad'

A tough perennial with tall and sturdy stems clad with black-bracted, deep-blue flowers for months on end. 1.2m. AGM. RHS H3, USDA 8a-10b.

20 *Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra'

The Japanese blood grass, will snake by stolons through the garden but will not, fortunately, self sow. Its translucent blades are best used if backlit. 40cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.

21 *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition'

A blue grama, with flag-like floating seedheads of bright yellow/gold following chartreuse flowers. 90cm. USDA 4a-9b.

22 *Salvia viridis* var. *comata*

An annual clary sage that self-seeds with long-lasting, bracted flowers and foliage with a lovely smoky fragrance. 45cm.

23 *Echinacea* 'Meteor Red'

One of an array of new, double echinaceas. Indispensable. Needs full sun and well-drained soils. 60cm. USDA 3a-8b.

24 *Sporobolus heterolepis*

Wonderful late-summer flowers and sensational seedheads with a scent of buttered popcorn. 1m. USDA 3a-9b.