



A Garden for the Non-Gardener
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Most homeowners have some sort of garden around their house but lets face it. not everyone wants to spend time looking after it. For some of us, gardening is an enjoyable pastime while for others it is a chore. There is a lot of advice for gardeners, but very little for non-gardeners.

We recently have had to think about designing a garden for a non-gardener for a small lot. The objective is to give the property some street appeal and a usable backyard without creating a lot of extra maintenance chores. The property now has a fairly standard front yard with a tiny lawn and common foundation shrubs lined up next to the building.

The back lawn is weedy and there is what seems to be a former garden next to the house which is full of Himalayan balsam, an invasive weed which stands chest high and seeds everywhere. Clearly, one of the first tasks is to deal with the weeds, but without a plan for what will replace them, they are bound to return very quickly. The best way to do this is to remove the weeds, lay down cardboard, cover it with compost from the city and replant right away. You have to be careful when you do this that you do not alter the drainage away from the house.

The front yard faces west and is full sun while the back gets some sun mid day but is mostly shaded. Besides, the weeds, we already know some things that need to be removed. There is a seedling Norway Maple that is already large enough to cause problems. There is also a seedling walnut tree in the foundation shrubs in the front garden. Although we detest Norway Maples, we like Walnuts but both need to go because they are both in the wrong place.

It would be nice to have a tree for shade from the west sun in the summer. If there is room for a tree at all, it needs to be small and it should not block the view from the street. Two possibilities come to mind: a magnolia with attractive leaves which can have an open habit if pruned right or a honey locust which has small leaves reducing raking in the fall and casts dappled rather than dense shade. Either tree would have to be pruned over the first few years to reveal the front of the house.

Peonies are an excellent choice for a sunny garden like the front garden of this property. While most perennials need to be dug up every few years to divide and keep them from overcrowding, peonies are perfectly happy to stay in one place undisturbed for forty years. Just add a bit of compost around them without covering the growing tips too deeply and they will be very happy. There is no need to settle for the standard old varieties that flop over in the first rain. Have a look at the peony collection in Oshawa or visit Blossom Hill Nursery on Fife's Bay road and pick out something spectacular.

Daylilies are another perennial that do well in full sun and are easy to look after. They come in a variety of colours mostly orange and yellow. You could even grow a very nice daylily named after Peterborough. One of our favourites is one called Frans Hals which has alternating yellow and dark orange. Near Peterborough, Gardens Plus in Donwood specializes in daylilies.

We might try Goats Beard, a tall perennial that gets striking white plumes in June. This is a strong performer and takes little work. It might work as a replacement for some of the foundation shrubs to one side.

Grasses, not often used in foundation borders, are also a possibility and are very easy to look after. One of our favourites is a cool season grass, Blue Oat Grass It would incorporate colour without having to rely on flowers.

There are many other sun tolerant perennials that are also easy to look after: Ladies Mantle, Heuchera, Japanese Iris, Sedums, Hens and Chicks, Lambs Ears, Ground Plox, Cotoneaster, There are also great shrubs if you have room for them: Hydrangea, Yew, Mock Orange, Beauty Bush, Ninebark, Elder and Spirea.

The backyard of this house probably needs to have the grass removed completely with a simple garden of ground covers and hard surfaces. A more restful look can be had by planting many of the same perennial together. It also simplifies maintenance. A good choice here for partial shade would be Hosta of various shapes and colours as well as Heuchera. If there is room for shrubs, there are various colours of ninebark and Mock Orange is a strong performer with a great scent when in flower. The backyard also needs a simple water feature with the sound of trickling water to drown out the street noise. It also needs a couple of bird feeders to attract the birds.

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