

# Four Seasons for a Family

THIS REMODELING PROJECT INCORPORATED THE LANDSCAPE DESIGN FROM THE START, WHICH ALLOWED NEW GARDEN ENTRYWAYS AND VIEWS TO BLEND WITH THE ARCHITECTURE. THE RESULTING YARDS OFFER FOUR SEASONS OF 'JUST RIGHT.'

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**I**t's nice when all the pieces fit together. But a well-designed landscape that fits the architecture, its owner and the context of the neighborhood does not happen by accident. It is the result of planning and thoughtful collaboration. The owners of this Deerfield home did all the right things, at least when it came to planning their landscape. Unlike many who remodel, they did not wait until the house was complete before thinking about the yard.

Early in the process, they brought in Nancy Lyons Hannick of NLH Landscape Architects of Highland Park. Getting the landscape planner involved early is a great idea for many reasons. One is that a master land-

scape plan establishes a goal that can be achieved in stages. Installing this project in three phases, for example, spread out the cost. In addition, good traffic flow patterns from the inside to the outside can be established from the outset. Also, existing trees, which are often naively destroyed in the construction process, can also be identified and preserved.

Because good landscape design is an extension of the architecture, it should be considered in the entire architectural design process rather than made to "fit in" later. This can also save some money. Mistakes made because of improper planning can carry a substantial cost in the long run.

This 1960s house was plagued with

ubiquitous overgrown evergreen shrub foundation plantings. The owners added a new garage and mud room, with bedrooms above. The remodeling project necessitated some much-needed changes to the landscape. The master plan called for removing the evergreen beasts and also rethinking the whole idea of a front entry. Better curb appeal and traffic flow to and from the front door were primary goals.

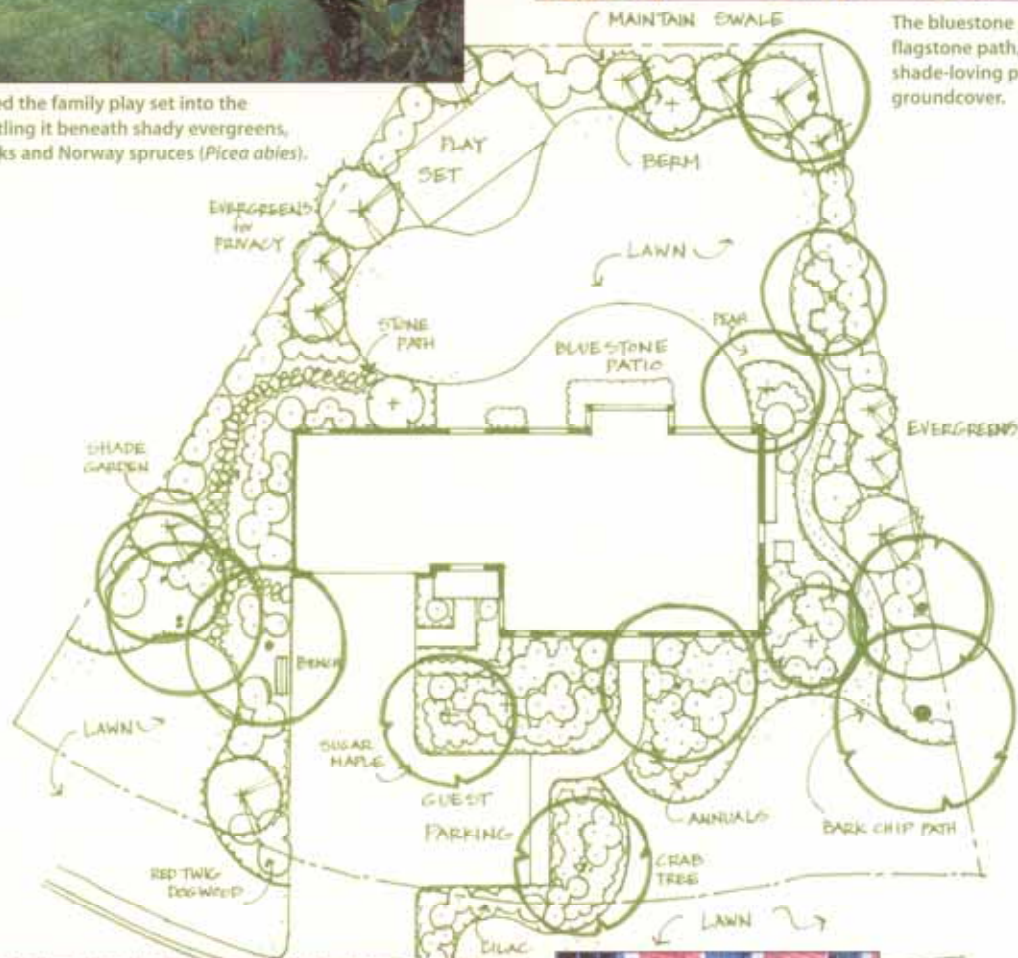
"The clients wanted a better sense of arrival," says Hannick, and the new parking court and entry walk that she designed provide that. Before a visitor even reaches the front door, there is a welcoming feeling of having arrived, similar to what one feels when entering a house with a foyer.



Hannick integrated the family play set into the landscape by nestling it beneath shady evergreens, including hemlocks and Norway spruces (*Picea abies*).



The bluestone patio and flagstone path, flanked by shade-loving plants and groundcover.



The driveway, masked by 'Red Jewel' crabapple and dwarf lilacs (*Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin'). The mud room entrance is hidden so as not to confuse it with the front door.



The spotlighted front entryway, which harvests a welcoming feeling of "having arrived." Hannick's design helped to create better curb appeal and traffic flow to and from the front door.



**Above:** The final masterpiece—for a young family to enjoy year-round. From spring serviceberry to winterberry, this landscape design showcases plants for every season.



**The Deerfield home before remodeling—the overgrown evergreen shrubs were taken out and replaced by a sugar maple, lilacs and annuals.**

The parking court provides extra space for cars of course, but it is sufficiently screened from the street by 'Red Jewel' crabapple and a mass of dwarf lilacs (*Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin') so that it does not feel like a lonely slab. "You really don't notice the driveway now," notes Hannick.

Equally invisible now is the mud room entry. Located on the front of the house next to the garage, it had the potential to be confusing to visitors looking for the front entrance. Hannick's plan addresses this perfectly by drawing visitors to the front door and giving the mud room entrance less importance. While the mud room door is not necessarily screened from view, it is made obvious through space planning that it is a private entrance.

The owners were deeply involved

in the design process, and requested a diverse plant palette as well as a strategically placed bench alongside the drive. Not only is the bench a great place for kids to wait for car pools and camp buses, it is a comfy spot for parents to sit while kids play in the driveway.

Plantings are varied and provide four seasons of color. Many bulbs and flowering trees greet the owners in spring, including serviceberry (*Amelanchier x grandiflora*), star magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*), flowering crab (*Malus* 'Red Jewel') and pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*). Shrubs like dwarf fothergilla, 'Palibin' lilac and 'Annabelle hydrangea' extend the season into early summer. Perennials, including lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*), two varieties of astilbe (red

'Fanal' and white 'Deutschland'), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* 'Goldsturm') and anemone (*A. vitifolia* *robustissima*) provide color throughout the season.

"Every two weeks you are going to find something different going on there. It changes constantly!" exclaims Hannick. Though perennials provide constant change, annuals provide consistent color through the year. Pots and annual beds are jam-packed with plants like pansies, impatiens, fountain grass and mums, which are rotated several times a year. Hannick has a plan worked out so it is a systematic rotation.

The annual scheme continues in the backyard, which has a different character altogether. Implemented in phase two, the backyard was designed with the owners' three children in mind. Its graceful, functional character is well-suited for family, entertaining, and play. The bluestone patio extends seamlessly into the lawn, which allows the entertaining space to expand if needed. The patio's perimeter line is continued by the lawn edge, which creates a pleasingly shaped lawn.

Just as there is a smooth transition from patio to lawn, so too is the transition from front yard to back. Because the lot is an irregular shape, the space between the house and the east

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property line could have been an awkwardly-shaped lawn. Instead, Hannick opted to eliminate lawn altogether here and create a flagstone garden path planted with shade-tolerant arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum* 'Chicago Lustre'), 'Annabelle' hydrangea, winterberry (*Ilex verticillata* 'Winter Red'), witchhazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*) and lush groundcover.

The owners had tolerated an unattractive drainage swale in the back for years. Hannick addressed this by screening it with a berm, which not only hides the swale, but also serves as a great way to display colorful plantings such as the 'Fanal' astilbe and a serviceberry flanked by two Canadian hemlocks (*Tsuga canadensis*). The evergreens do not appreciate saturated soil and the berm elevates them above that potential problem.

A family backyard often includes a play set for the kids, and this is no exception. When Hannick arrived, the play set was sited in the soggy southwest corner. It now lies nestled under the canopy of an existing shade tree on the east side of the yard. It is out of the hot sun, yet still visible from the house.

Winter interest was a key goal of the design plan. In all, the backyard includes seven hemlocks and four Norway spruces (*Picea abies*). But other plants provide winter interest as well, including variegated red twig dogwood (*Cornus alba* 'Elegantissima'), winterberry, and sedum 'Autumn Joy'.

This is truly a four-season landscape, but where it really shines is in the fall. Late summer perennials like sedum complement the fall foliage of shrubs such as serviceberry, Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), ornamental pear (*Pyrus* 'Chanticleer'), and fothergilla, while seasonal annuals continue blooming in a final explosion of autumn colors.

An accidental landscape this is not. It is also not a "one trick pony." This Deerfield home is attractive in all seasons and accommodates the lifestyle of a young family. It does not overly rely on plants, although the plants are important. It reflects the needs of the owners and is appropriate to the architecture and the property. ♡