

Making Our Paradise

This past year we did major improvements in the backyard at our house. Our patio, and the area around it, is an important part of our outdoor living space. It is visible to us when sitting at the kitchen table. Also, this space also serves as a connection from our house to our driveway, receiving a lot of foot traffic.

For me, the renovation was transformational. What was beaten down grass with no sense of purpose has been transformed into an intimate space. We began 2013 with an ambitious schedule starting with replacing an old canopy structure on the patio with a wooden pergola. I seized the opportunity to grow more vines so a Wisteria '*Amethyst Falls*' and an Actinidia '*Issai*' were quickly planted in mid-June. By the end of the season, both put on an additional eight feet of growth!

Next we had our entire backyard deer fenced. Finally our vegetable and berry patch and other garden plants can be grown without plastic deer netting around each bed! As a gardener, I feel a huge sense of relief at the prospect of gardening without deer (at least in our backyard).

In late June, my brother, Rick, and I constructed an arbor out of black locust posts that I cut down from our farm. With this addition, the patio garden really began to take shape by defining the pathway to our driveway and providing a sense of enclosure to the patio. And, it offers another opportunity to grow more vines! On one side I planted Lonicera '*Major Wheeler*' and '*Serotina*'. I am excited by the combination - early and long blooming scarlet, red flowers and evergreen foliage of native '*Major Wheeler*' paired with the intoxicating fragrance of later blooming, purple and yellow flowered '*Serotina*'. The other side of the arbor is dedicated to clematis. Clematis montana '*Grandiflora*' will provide sweetly fragrant, white, spring flowers that will glow in the moonlight. Clematis '*Betty Corning*' and '*Gravetye Beauty*' will offer complimenting summer displays of light blue and deep red.

I laid a stepping stone pathway of large flagstones, giving me an opportunity to plant stepping stone groundcovers which included Sagina '*Spring Lime*', Sedum bithynicum, Thymus '*Magic Carpet*', Trifolium '*Black Ice*' and Veronica repens with Lysimachia japonica var. minutissima in the part shade under the arbor. Finally, in September the spaces on both sides of the pathway were planted. The plants used here were selected for several reasons: cut flower, songbirds, hummingbird & butterfly attracting, and native. Others were included to learn more about them through gardening.

The goal of the whole project was to create an intimate, private space for my family's enjoyment. With a cottage garden feel, we want to have cut flowers within easy reach, attract wildlife (except deer) and to always have something in bloom. If your backyard (or front) is not quite the space you would like it to be, I hope I have inspired you to make your own paradise this year. We want nothing less than a paradise in our own backyard!