

## Garden Case Study

### A Vacation at Home in La Grange Park

Sometimes one wonders if they can recreate that feeling of a favorite childhood vacation from the past. Year after year our family traveled into Northern Wisconsin to spend a week at the same resort. This resort had five cottages, and as a kid, it always felt like we were separated from the rest of the world. That is the feeling I got when I entered Carol's yard. Sitting on her backyard deck and chatting while surrounded by beautiful plants, trees and bushes, I was transported back to sitting on the porch outside our cottage playing games, reading, eating, and enjoying nature.

When Carol moved into her house (over 20 years ago), it had what many might consider traditional landscaping - a few bushes, flowers, and grass. Her goal was to create a relaxed and informal garden and home away from home, full of color, and reduce the grass cover to minimize the need for mowing. While the desire to include native plants was important, non-native plants were also included to create a beautiful garden.

As you approach, the centerpiece of the front yard is a beautiful Redbud tree (native to Illinois) that has gorgeous, dark green heart-shaped leaves and small pink flowers in the Spring. During Fall, the Redbud turns a bright yellow.

The front yard and walkway are surrounded by plants including the obedient flower (a native light purple plant that blooms in late Summer), lavender, a smoke plant, coneflowers and a variety of native grasses and groundcover, which bloom throughout the growing season.

Striking is the limited amount of grass, and the use of mulch in the yard. The mulch adds interest and texture, helps maintain moisture throughout the year and acts as an insulator for plant roots, keeping them cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

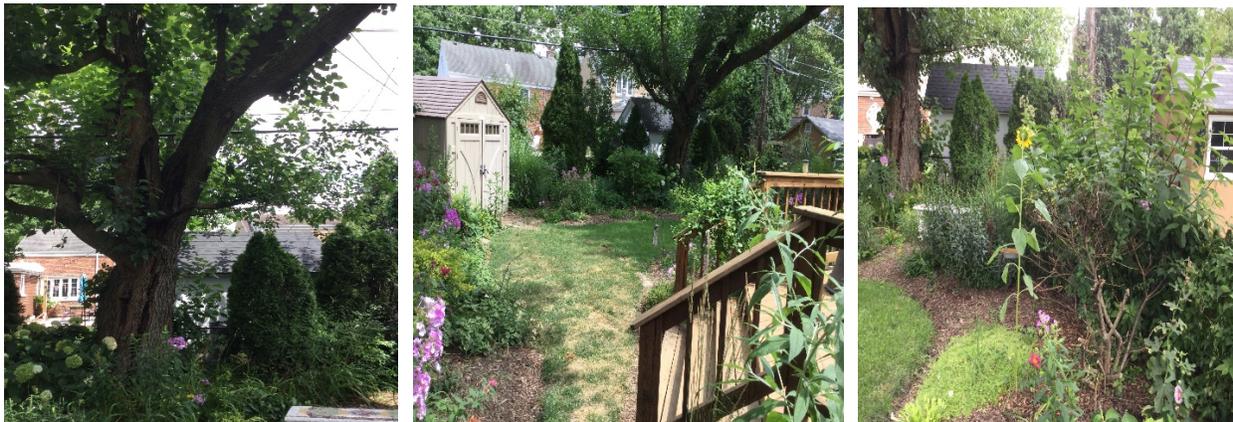


One entry to the backyard is a walkway along the garage, surrounded by hostas, day lilies, and sweet autumn clematis (a non-native variety that grows very well in Illinois and blooms small

white flowers in late Summer/Fall). A trellis, overflowing with a native variety of clematis with beautiful purple bell-shaped flowers, creates the entryway to the backyard garden. The flowers typically bloom Spring through early Summer but can last longer.



A mulberry tree dominates the backyard and provides a lovely shade canopy for much of the garden. The tree is native to Illinois and generally produces edible berries. A male and female tree are needed in order to produce berries. Two mulberry trees originally grew in the yard, however, one was cut down, so the remaining tree no longer produces fruit.



Another delightful backyard feature is the deck that fully spans the back of the home, providing a lovely view of the garden spanning the yard. A variety of native plants surround the deck including purple and white phlox, (blooms from July to September), bee balm (flowers briefly in the early Summer) which is great for butterflies and bees, and a purple obedient plant.



A nearby butterfly bush attracts hummingbirds and butterflies. Also adorning the backyard are several varieties of native grass and groundcover interspersed with Annabelle hydrangeas (blooms late Summer to early Fall), purple phlox, clematis along the fence, obedient plants, wild orange daylilies, and a variety of ferns. Black-eyed susans that blooms from early to late Summer, and additional varieties of wild a daisies and strawberries (all native to the area) are also present along with hostas, daylilies and honeysuckle. A lone blooming sunflower stands out.



An abundance of peonies greets you as you walk around the other side of the home. While not native to this area, peonies are popular across Illinois. Most peonies bloom for ten to fourteen days in late Spring. There are also some smaller peonies from Czechoslovakia inherited by the previous owners that are approximately 80 years old.



As I walk back around to the front, I viewed serpentine cherry, which blooms in the Spring (lovely white flowers), and in the winter it looks almost like a sculpture. While certainly lengthy, this extensive list of plants is not all inclusive. Instead, it provides an idea of the incredible variety of plants Carol has creatively integrated throughout her landscape over the years.



As I finished my visit, I asked Carol what she might advise someone new to gardening and native gardening, and what plants she might recommend. Her first suggestion is start out small. Pick an area in your yard that could really benefit from a change. You can also try adding some potted plants. And do not be shy about using annuals to add some color. Read articles on gardening and attend local plant sales. Another good resource are local garden clubs. The University of Illinois has a Master Gardener program that can also be useful. Conservatories provide additional information and often offer programs and lectures that can be helpful. Talk

to neighbors whose yard you admire to get some tips. That is what I did. I contacted Carol after seeing her yard on my regular walks.

Plants that might be good starters, lenten roses, tulips, daffodils, and snowdrops are good for early Spring. Daisies and wild daisies are great for late Spring and early Summer. Bee balm, hydrangeas, native grasses, and phlox do well in mid-Summer. Asters tend to be easy to care for and flower in the Fall.