

Golf in the Low-Country Landscape

# Southern Living

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## Gardening

*Mr. Smith  
Builds His Garden*

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# A Garden Built For Comfort

*This garden is just right for savoring a quiet moment or gathering with friends. There are paths to stroll, places to sit, and plenty of flowers to enjoy.*

BY LINDA ASKEY WEATHERS / PHOTOGRAPHY VAN CHAPLIN

Comfortable. That is the word that best describes the Atlanta garden of William T. Smith. That is not to say that it's not lovely, because it is. But it also possesses the kind of comfort you find in an easy chair. It is so well planned and executed that it is, as it should be, a haven to enjoy.

"I get enough restless feelings in my day, so I want to feel calm when I see my garden," remarks Bill. Designed to ease maintenance, the garden is remarkably ordered and visually relaxing. Yet for all its organization, the garden keeps a strong naturalistic element in its plantings.

"I wanted to save the trees and work the design around them," he explains. "The lawn itself is tailored, but simple. Because it is simple I was able to juxtapose it with nature."

The perennial borders are accents against a framework of evergreens, such as aucubas, nandinas, mountain laurels, pieris, boxwoods, hollies, and hemlocks. "I wanted to look out on a winter day and see a garden, not a bare perennial bed," he says.

But nothing is as commanding as color, and Smith uses it well, for he is both an avid gardener as well as a



landscape architect. "When I designed the garden," he says, "I knew that I wanted perennials for sun as well as for shade, and I had the perfect opportunity to carry that out."

The north end of the garden catches a lot of light, even with its trees, so that's where Smith puts most of his sun-loving flowers. At the south end, which is lower in elevation, shade-loving perennials and woodland wildflowers thrive in the moist soil.

Experience has taught him that, whenever possible, a border needs to have plenty of depth. "I like to give perennial borders enough room to have an array of plants, so I don't have to depend on just one height. I had that luxury in both borders and had the room to have walkways, not only for circulation, but for weeding."

And circulation was the key to his plan for the sunny border. Instead of designing a brick wall to handle the change in level between the bed and the lawn, Smith built steps. "I wanted to invite people into the border. People want to get to the flowers, to touch, smell, and get close to them. If I had put a wall there, it would have been an obstacle." With that in mind,

*Because of its simplicity, Bill Smith's garden is restful and inviting. Each season offers a variety of delights.*

he made the steps generous, about 17 inches deep and about 5 inches high.

After the flowers, the lawn is probably the most striking element of the garden. Edged in brick and clipped to an immaculate ½ inch, this Emerald Zoysia sod is a smooth-textured foreground to the garden around it. But by designing the lawn carefully, Smith has eliminated unnecessary maintenance. He explains, "Before I went to college I was cutting my parents' grass. They had lots of dogwoods to mow around. When I redesigned their garden, the first thing I did was to replace the grass around the trees with ground cover."

Now, he says with satisfaction, "I can cut the lawn in seven minutes, and that's not too much to ask. I knew I wanted grass to set off the colors, but I couldn't be a slave to the lawn. If anything, I was going to put my time into the perennials."

And he has. Beneath the white dogwoods of spring the sunny perennial border yields bouquets of blue phlox, pink tulips, white tulips, pansies, and white azaleas. In summer the colors are similar, but the flowers change. Ageratum replaces the blue pansies at the front of the border, and pink begonias, garden phlox, blue salvia, sedum, caladiums, and ferns fill the bed. Obviously, not all of Smith's flowers are perennials. He explains, "I plant whatever is necessary to coax bloom into the garden, whether it is a perennial, biennial, bulb, or seed."

By his own admission, Smith is opinionated about color. "A perfectly beautiful plant could be placed too close to another, and their colors may vie with each other to the point that you get a restless feeling. But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't have some accents. In fact I make sure I have a little bit of red somewhere, because in a pastel garden, the colors can bleed out in bright sunlight."

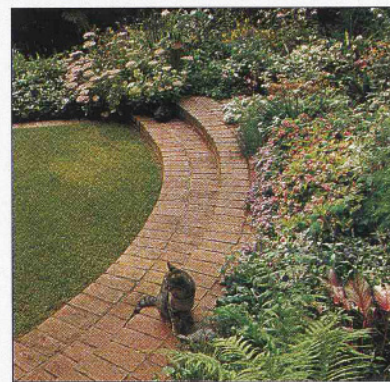
But there's more to this garden than color. He explains, "Perennials don't bloom forever, so you have to be concerned with texture, form, the placement of colors, and how they work together."

At the opposite end of the lawn, the shaded garden springs to life. Ferns, epimedium, foamflower, hardy cyclamen, miniature daffodils, hostas, bleeding heart, and mosses make soothing combinations. Although the color is more subtle, so is the light, and shades of color and variations in texture work together to delight the eye. ◇



#### DESIGN TIPS

- First and foremost, never design more garden than you feel you can handle.
- If you want curves, don't use wiggles. They should be simple and bold, which makes them easier on the eye and easier to maintain.
- Planning a perennial garden is a waste of time if you don't prepare the soil well. You need good drainage as well as good amendments.
- Garden color does not have to be as complicated as a perennial border. Simplify your approach by planting annuals that will bloom all season long.



Steps make a gentle transition between the lawn and perennial bed.



(Above) The lawn offers a smooth foreground to the rest of the garden, yet its size and shape are easy to maintain. (Left) A flagstone terrace and brick wall were original to the garden; the rest is Smith's design.