



Landscape architect Silvia Erskine creates garden rooms with a view in Southport

When Virginia Cargill bought her waterfront property in Southport eight years ago, she knew that it needed some work. The white clapboard house needed an addition, and the garden, as she describes it, “was just grass.”

Luckily, Virginia, an entrepreneur and a founding editor of *Caring Today* magazine, was used to start-ups. She turned to Wilton landscape architect Silvia Erskine to create a garden that didn’t compete with its imposing view, drew attention away from the driveway and linked the garage to the house. The result is a series of garden rooms (a perennial garden, an herb garden, a barbeque terrace and dining patio) that encircle the house and provide complementary outdoor living spaces. “I think about how interior and exterior spaces affect one another,” Silvia says.

Another consideration in the design was the garden’s exposed location — ten feet above the Long Island Sound. The plants had to be hardy enough to withstand the drying winds and be adaptable to the site, and Silvia had to avoid tall trees or formal stone walls that might block the neighbors’ view. She framed the space with hedges of Green Mountain boxwood, which is known for its hardiness, small leaves and short stature (it won’t grow higher than six feet tall). Creating gorgeous year-round views, Silvia chose plants that bloom in spring, summer and autumn.

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— Mary Scott Himes



Choose plants that will give year-round visual interest. Silvia used a backdrop of evergreens and mixed them with plants that bloom in the spring, summer and autumn.

Planting beds should be six- to eight-feet deep to allow for three levels of planting. Here, low-lying Lamb’s Ears, perennial Geranium, Lady’s Mantle and Catnip line the front; mid-height Astilbe, Salvia, Coreopsis, Achillea and Sedum are in the middle; and the tallest plants, Foxglove, Phlox, Iris, Peonies, Lilies and Blue Mist Shrub, create the back layer.

“Strong winds that come off Long Island Sound can dry out large-leaved evergreens,” says Silvia. Instead, she chose hardy species with small leaves such as boxwood.

Liriope, a semi-evergreen groundcover, flowers in the late summer and helps to define the edges of the garden.

Silvia limited the amount of lawn to visually balance the view of the Long Island Sound.

Green Mountain boxwood, a new American hybrid, “provides year-round structure in the garden and helps to buffer the view of the driveway from the living spaces,” Silvia says.

The fieldstone pavers create a space distinct from the lawn and perennial gardens.

Just off the kitchen, the herb garden has purple and silver sage, chives, lemon balm, parsley and basil that add fragrance and textural interest as well as supply fresh cooking ingredients.

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