

# leafing out

A focus on dramatic foliage in a Seattle garden delivers maximum impact with minimal upkeep.



**a**s graphic designers and plant aficionados, Michael Connors and his husband, Dean Hart, thought coming up with a vision for their Seattle backyard would happen naturally. It turned out that “our love of plants actually made it harder,” Michael says. “After years of trying, all we had was a random assortment of cool plants.” Realizing they needed outside expertise, they turned to garden designer Paul Broadhurst for help.

Broadhurst suggested designing the

▲ In the roughly 1,000-square-foot yard, designer Paul Broadhurst layered plants by height, starting with low-growing deer fern and Japanese painted fern along the walkway and rising to hydrangea, bride’s feathers, and yellow wax bells.

garden around one theme—foliage—and planting in large swaths. “I like to use fewer plant varieties but in broad brushstrokes,” Broadhurst says. By planting in blocks and emphasizing leaf shapes and colors, the designer created a garden that is at once modern and lush, plus looks good year-round. Focusing on foliage also means the couple has to do little deadheading or other maintenance. “We have more time to sit in the garden with a glass of wine or hang out on the deck while we watch hummingbirds dart in and out of the bamboo,” Michael says.

▼ The distinct leaf shapes of neighboring perennials build contrast. Here the long, sword-shape leaves of hart's tongue fern stand out against the heart-shape white-and-green 'Jack Frost' brunnera.



▲ A granite fountain fits the modern aesthetic, and the sound of water creates a soothing atmosphere.



A grid of concrete pavers forms a graphic (and affordable) patio.

“So much of how we experience the garden is from above.” MICHAEL CONNORS



▲ Broadhurst installed the patio at an angle so it would provide the best view of the surrounding plants. As a geometric detail, one patio corner fits neatly into a notch cut into the seat wall.

◀ The existing bamboo forms a privacy screen along the property line. Underneath is a carpet of Oregon oxalis, which is native to the Pacific Northwest. Uplighting the pale green bamboo creates a serene mood in the evening and helps extend the time the garden can be enjoyed.



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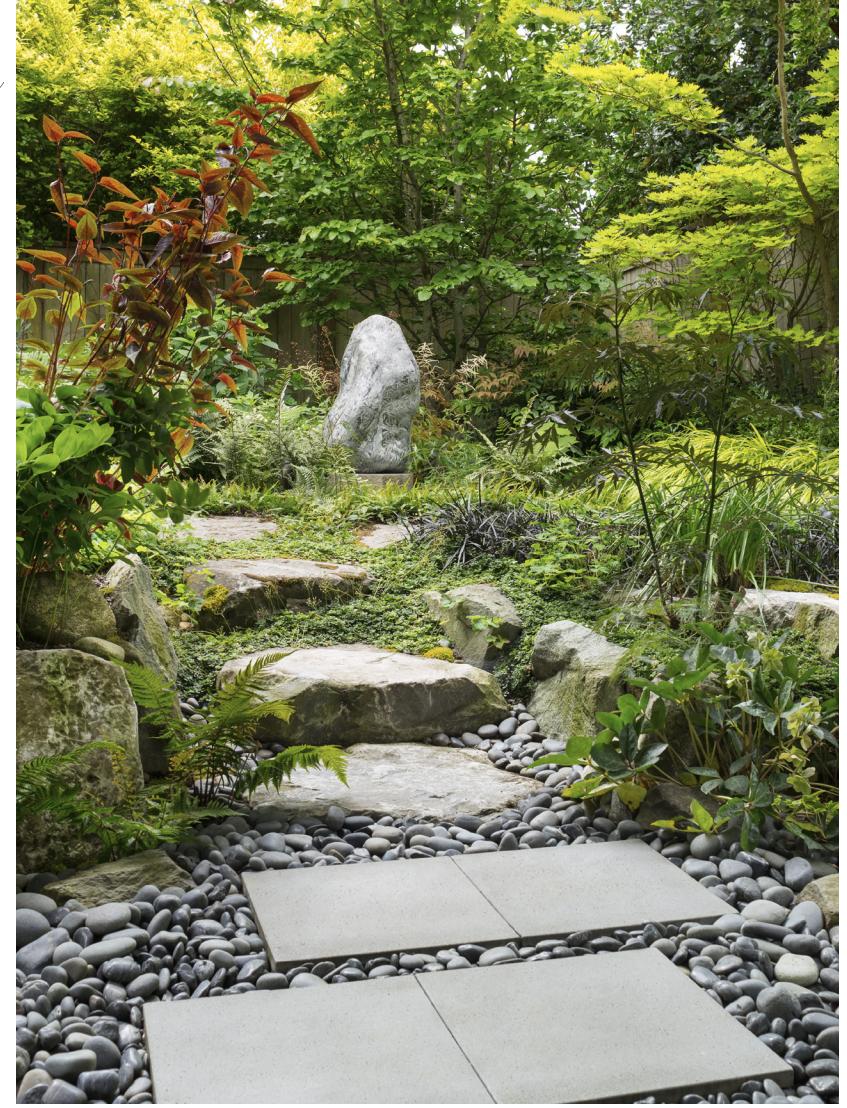
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“Now we think of foliage when buying new plants. Our creativity flows within some limits.”

- MICHAEL CONNORS
- ▶ Mexican beach pebbles surround a path of pavers just outside the basement door to the garden. A few steps in, the path transitions to natural stone, with tightly packed plants and groundcovers creeping between them and hiding virtually all the soil.
  - ▼ Strategically placed trees, such as a golden fullmoon maple and Persian ironwood, add height to the garden so the deck doesn't overpower the view for people sitting on the patio.



The deck's wire railing has a clean look and preserves the garden views.

PHOTOS: (PORTRAIT) CLAIRE TAKACS



[PRO TIPS]  
**THINK LIKE A DESIGNER**

Paul Broadhurst shares the elements that make for a successful garden, especially in small spaces.

**BIG PICTURE**  
 When you're planning a garden, "don't think about plants first," Broadhurst says. Figure out what mood you're going for and how you'll be using the space. "Once you've built the visual in your head, you can pick the plants to achieve it."

**FOCAL PLANTS**  
 Build around plants that have interesting leaf forms and colors. This results in a space that looks good in three or even four seasons.

**GROUNDCOVERS**  
 Planting groundcovers along patio edges and around hardscaping makes the space feel filled out and considered.

**PERSONAL TOUCHES**  
 Select only a few meaningful ornamental pieces, such as a fountain or sculpture. Then place them near a walkway or patio, lighting them for extra impact at night. ■

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