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TOP: Landscape designer Joyce Williams pops blooming dahlias into an empty spot in the flower border of her garden in Chatham, Massachusetts. **ABOVE:** Joyce tucked *Sedum hybridum* 'Immergrünchen' into dry cracks of the granite stonework. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A client gave Joyce a division of this yellow-and-purple bearded iris, which she says "spreads politely with a lovely lemon fragrance."

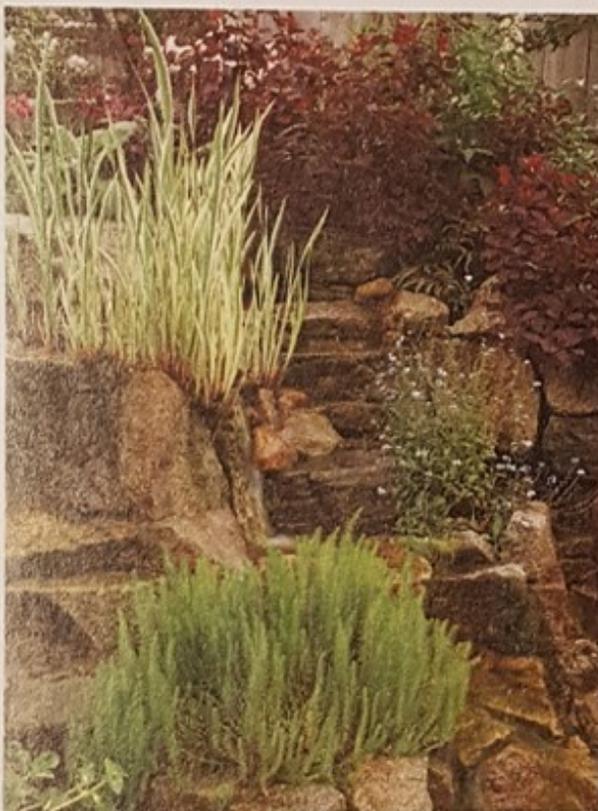
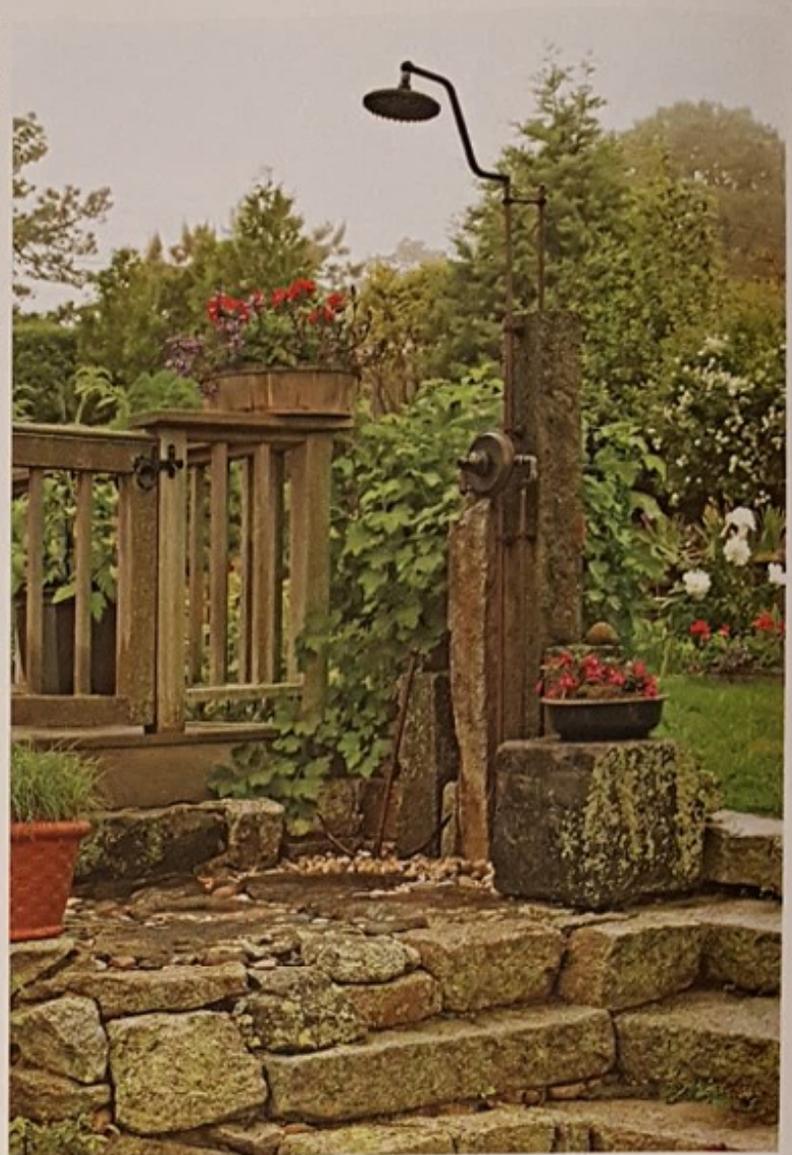


Stairway to Heaven

A landscape designer turns a steep, sloping lot into a private Shangri-La.



From the deck, Joyce enjoys this view of her potting shed, waterfall, and stone steps.



MOST FOLKS BUY A HOME FOR THE SHELTER it provides, but borrowed views of an ancient freshwater kettle pond bordered by a nature preserve drew landscape designer Joyce Williams to her small Cape Cod-style home. Kettle ponds are formed when a glacier deposits sand and gravel outwash on and around ice blocks. When the ice melts, the outwash caves in, forming holes that eventually fill with rainwater that goes up and down with the water table. The fact that the house “needed lots of work was overruled by its natural setting,” Joyce says. She says the water was the real attraction, along with different ground levels suitable for different types of gardens.

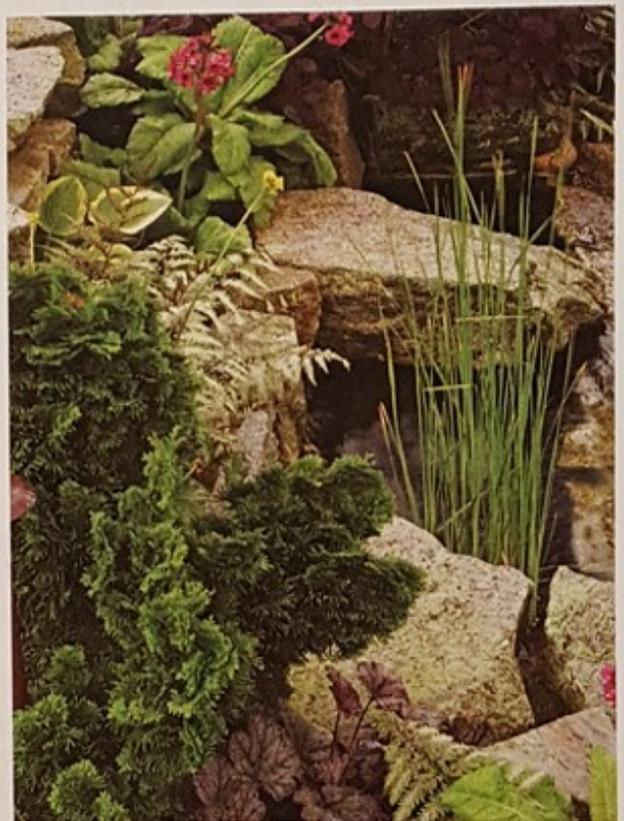
Her home is in Chatham, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, where such landforms are fairly common; it sits on the pond’s long, steep bank, which is the quarter-acre lot’s best asset and greatest challenge. Joyce came up with an elegant solution, terracing the slope and creating upper and lower lawns connected by 11 steps and a waterfall, all made of granite.

ABOVE LEFT: ‘Yaku Princess’ rhododendrons, hydrangeas, foxgloves, and peonies line the lawn path to the potting shed. **ABOVE:** Between the deck and the top of the steps is an outdoor shower that lets Joyce rinse off after a day of gardening or swimming in the kettle pond below her house. **LEFT:** Variegated water iris (*Iris laevigata* ‘Variegata’), mare’s tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*), and true forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) grow in the waterfall’s shallow waters.



The first phase of the design included a brick front walk to replace the old gravel path; a cedar potting shed, now her summer retreat and a focal point in the upper garden; and a 75-foot, boomerang-shape flower border, which defines the transition from the manicured lower lawn to the wild slope and pondside wetlands. Joyce planted the border with traditional spring bloomers such as allium, iris, cosmos, penstemon, and viola. “When I designed the landscape, I thought about what I like, what would work for the site, and what wouldn’t be invasive,” she says. It happens that birds like what Joyce likes, and many species alight on the lower lawn, including flocks of Redwing Blackbirds.

Joyce installed the steps, waterfall, and a unique outdoor shower 12 years ago, working on the design with J. C. Stahl, a landscape architect and principal of Poetics of Space, who also built the waterfall. “I like natural materials,” Joyce says. The steps are locally sourced, reclaimed granite curbing. “The stones in the waterfall are not uniform in size or shape. I wanted



ABOVE: Joyce designed stone steps and a waterfall to deal with the steep change in grade on her Cape Cod property. Joyce softens the stonework by planting shrubs and perennials in and around the waterfall. **RIGHT:** *Primula japonica* ‘Carminea’ is a moisture-loving magenta-flower candelabra primrose that blooms from late spring to early summer near the waterfall, alongside variegated hosta and Japanese painted fern.



ABOVE: Adirondack chairs overlook stunning borrowed views, including a glacial kettle pond where Joyce likes to swim. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** Instead of cutting back her ‘Globemaster’ allium after it blooms, she lets it go to seed and become food for the birds. Visitors to Joyce’s Cape Cod cottage enter beneath an arch, painted the same blue-green hue as the front door. Prostrate blue spruce (*Picea pungens* ‘Glauca Prostrata’) grows next to the waterfall, where it thrives in full sun and softens the angular edges of the granite. Foxgloves and ‘Emerald Gaiety’ euonymus brighten the lawn path to the shed with a window box overflowing with pink New Guinea impatiens and white bacopa.

blocky stones, not rounded, so it looks like an old foundation emerging from the ground,” she says. Joyce accentuated their horizontal lines to correspond to the eye’s natural direction of movement.

Various plantings soften the sharp angles of the stone. Flowers grow in containers on the steps, and self-sown plants emerge from cracks. Drought-tolerant prostrate blue spruce tumbles over a retaining wall, while in the waterfall moisture-lovers, such as variegated mannagrass, mare’s tail, striped water iris, and true forget-me-nots grow submerged in pots and wet planting pockets.

Frequently Joyce and her friends swim in the pond and her dogs play on the sandy beach below her home, so an outdoor shower was a must in her backyard design. The open-air shower she designed sits on axis

with the steps and waterfall, which are perpendicular to the mahogany deck overlooking the pond. The shower area, located two steps down from the deck at the top of the rocky stairs, is made of natural stone to unify the landscape. The bronze showerhead was drilled and mounted on a tall granite post. Why not enclose the shower for privacy? “Because I have a beautiful view, I want to shower in the open,” she says.

The landscape Joyce created is her haven—“rooms” planted with lush wildlife-friendly natives and perennials, a charming shed for her garden antiques, a shower to make washing off a pleasure, and a stone staircase and waterfall that unify her terraces and offer easy access. “I want to add beauty while blending the gardens with the natural surroundings,” she says. “And I want to enjoy them year-round.”

For more information, see Resources on page 110.



Garden at a Glance

Williams garden

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Garden shed | 7. Wood deck | 13. Pitch pine (<i>Pinus rigida</i>) | 19. Peony |
| 2. Stone steps with succulents | 8. Brick walkway | 14. White lilac | 20. Chokeberry (<i>Aronia</i>) |
| 3. Shower | 9. Arbor | 15. Japanese red maple | 21. Pink rhododendron |
| 4. Waterfalls | 10. Parking | 16. Foxglove | 22. Smoke bush |
| 5. Perennial garden | 11. Retaining wall | 17. 'Blue Ice' cypress | 23. Dwarf Hinoki cypress |
| 6. Birdbath | 12. 'Mayflower' viburnum | 18. White rhododendron | |