



STEAL FROM A PRO

THE EXPERT:
Kate Lacouture,
Green Circle
Design,
Providence,
Rhode Island

THE IDEA:
Follow the light

CALL IT A HAPPY ACCIDENT. THIS VIBRANT ORGANIC GARDEN—LACOUTURE'S OWN—OWES AS MUCH TO CONDITIONS BEHIND THE SCENES AS IT DOES ITS SUNNY LOCATION FRONT AND CENTER.

Peek into the backyard, and you'll find heavy shade, courtesy of a large Norway maple. Add to that the fact that it's prime play space for three kids and a dog, and you get less than ideal conditions for a food- and flower-filled garden. But instead of giving up on her goals, Lacouture simply appropriated the sun-filled front yard, ditching the shrubs and turf for a kaleidoscope of fruits, flowers, and herbs.

Pulling the gardening activity to the front of her house allows the whole neighborhood to reap the rewards of Lacouture's vision. In this urban setting, the sidewalk is an ideal vantage point from which to enjoy the display, and compliments are common. Lacouture hopes that passersby realize that a front-yard garden filled with many different kinds of plants can be sustainable, visually gratifying, and more practical than a lawn. —Lori S. Ball

MORE IDEAS FROM THE PRO:

Invite surprises

Before planting her front-yard garden, Lacouture killed the grass with several layers of newspaper over the winter. She recommends starting with plants that provide structure—in her case, apricot and espaliered apple trees and an oakleaf hydrangea. Then mix and match annuals, herbs, and vegetables alongside perennials and shrubs. Once your initial planting is done, she suggests you let unpredictability rule. Each spring, watch to see what and where perennials, annuals, and vegetables have self-seeded, then work around this new pattern. By allowing your garden to evolve in surprising ways, you discover which plants do best in your location.

Pack things in

Plant the mix densely. "My garden is unusually full," explains Lacouture. "You won't find mulch mounds here." This density means less weeding and, in Lacouture's case, requires no fertilizer or supplemental water. Instead of the typical short-to-tall orientation, place some of your tallest plants among low-growing ones, as well as along the garden's edges. This kind of mixture provides food, cover, and nesting sites for a variety of wildlife. Birds, grasshoppers, praying mantids, and hummingbirds flock to this microhabitat.



Fill 'er up: Planting a lot of plants close together helps shade out weeds and reduce mulching.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: MARY BETH MEEHAN