

New in Homes

French garden beckons



Elaine Carey

Lessons in Landscaping

Imagine turning your backyard into a fanciful French bistro from the 1950s, complete with a country potager garden.

That's what Adam Gracey, president of D.A. Gracey & Associates of Vaughan, has managed to do at this year's Canada Blooms Show at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

And with a little imagination, anyone can achieve the same effect in their backyard, he says. In fact, he's currently designing a garden similar to the show garden for a client in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The lower level of the garden features a food preparation area, where bunches of limes and oranges are washed in bubbling floor-level fountains. Whimsical "trees" made of broccoli, cabbages and eggplants stand in planters flanking a large blackboard featuring the day's menu over a pine harvest table.

In the traditional potager — a French-style ornamental kitchen garden where vegetables, flowers and herbs are grown together — Gracey has mixed fragrant rosebushes, tulips, irises, hellebores and coral bells with parsley and thyme and bordered the beds in cauliflowers. The plantings are kept simple by grouping several of each plant together, rather than dotting individual flowers or vegetables around the plot.

A white lilac and tall ash trees stand over the beds, while tall fir trees form a border around the back of the garden.

The garden path was also kept simple — limestone gravel, with



A "live" bronzed French chef stands and waves goodbye at the end of the garden designed by D.A. Gracey and Associates.

screening to keep the weeds out, is blocked with aged-looking cobblestones.

Two French geese figures covered in moss sit on a low stone wall.

On the upper level deck, Gracey has installed a magnificent canvas awning over the bistro

dining tables. Water flows over the awning into a pool below, then down to a small, third fountain where the limes are washed.

While his aim was to make it appear that it was raining outside the bistro, the overhead fountain adds superb sound and



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Left, two French geese figures covered in moss sit on a low stone wall. Right, bread and fruit contribute to French bistro 1950s theme.



The bistro garden took 22 people over five days to put together at the Canada Blooms show at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

offers a level of privacy to the dining area.

An arch over the bistro is covered with wisteria vine and Gracey has added clusters of grapes to give it the appearance of a French grape vine.

Planters are filled with herbs to form a container herb garden,

flanked by orange trees.

An authentic aged door, shutters and massive iron candle fixtures — all provided by The Door Store — lend an authentic French feel to the setting on the stucco walls. To add to the authenticity, a bronzed French chef statue stands at the end of

the garden. Except this chef is real — an actor who waves goodbye as you leave the bistro.

"Outdoor eating, outdoor cooking and preparing the meal outside — that's an upcoming trend," Gracey notes. "It creates that whole outdoor room effect."

"While we used to bring the food outside to cook it on the barbecue, then take it back inside to prepare and eat, now we're designing entire outdoor kitchens and everything is done outside," he adds.

Vegetables, herbs and flowers can be mixed together and grown right next to your patio so they can be picked as you prepare your meal. Boxwood shrubs can be planted around them for protection — dogs don't like the smell.

Planting several different plants together, as in nature, also deters insects, which are confused by the multitude of "smells" and have more difficulty finding the plant they prefer to eat and lay their eggs on.

Certain plants such as marigolds, mints and garlic are offensive to some insects. Strategically planting these plants in your garden will deter the insects from invading any part of the garden.

The bistro garden took 22 people more than five days to put together but the whole experience was fun, Gracey says.

"This is a whole show driven by passion more than anything else. We've all been doing it for, so many years, we all know and help each other now, as tiring as it is."

► The 10th anniversary Canada Blooms: The Toronto Flower and Garden Show, with more than 30 feature gardens, runs until 6 p.m. tomorrow in the Convention Centre's South building.

If you have an interesting landscape project, email ecarey@thestar.ca.