



A space between the garage and the fence once sheltered a playground. Now, with the children grown, it has been transformed into a garden.

Above, right: Linda Gartz and Craig Bergmann consulted closely throughout the process.



Rescuing a gardener from her 'obsessive compulsion' of ongoing plant buying, the famed designer brings order and flow to an 'overstuffed' garden

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In 1993, our back yard was an oozing mud pit. My husband Bill and I had just finished gutting and renovating our 75-year-old red brick Georgian. Low on funds, we settled for a landscape designer who was a consummate salesman but turned out to be a sad excuse for a gardener. As his ill-chosen plants and shrubs bit the dust, I counter-acted this steady attrition piecemeal with what Bill teasingly called my "obsessive compulsion."

Every summer Saturday, I returned from our local farmers' market or garden centers with a carload of plants in tow. After a decade of filling in the gaps, I had five healthy borders that bloomed from late February to the first frost. But the years of adding without editing had created a stuffed and overgrown look in my two largest perennial beds.

The Bergmann

Touch



Members of Bergmann's well-trained crew carefully dig up perennials to transplant elsewhere in the yard.



The crew prepared the ground for the new garden and laid out plywood to avoid stepping on freshly prepared soil and lawn.

The garden wasn't the only thing growing. My two young boys had become young men and had long ago given up the play set that had dominated the back of the yard, so down it came. We sodded the area over as I pondered my next move. How could I give my precious garden a well needed "facelift" without losing the money, effort, and loving care I had invested in my perennials for 10 years?

To get back on track, I turned to Craig Bergmann (a designer and owner of Craig Bergmann's Country Gardens in Winthrop Harbor), who had created my first Evanston garden back in 1978. Craig was just starting his business when I responded to a Xeroxed flyer in my mailbox, advertising his landscape design services.

I wanted to work with Craig again, but I knew he didn't usually redo gardens he hadn't originally designed. With our long history, I decided to ask anyway. His response: "You helped me when I needed it. I'll help you now."

Craig and his head gardener Russ Buvala arrived to check out my yard in the summer of 2003. "Overstuffed," they both agreed. "But your plants are thriving," said Craig. "You just need a new design—and more space." They decided to wait until early spring 2004, and move my perennials as they were just emerging.

Design: The Big Picture

Just days before his crew was to arrive in early April, Craig came to discuss his design ideas. "You know my work," he



After plants were dug up, they were labeled and bagged in burlap to await being transplanted.



Crew members move plants to their new homes according to Bergmann's re-design.

said, so we agreed to save on a major expense by forgoing a formal plan. Instead, he took me on a visual tour of the plan percolating in his mind. "We're going to join your two main gardens," he said, sweeping his hand across the east border, encircling the perimeter of the former play area, and pointing across the front of my garage. "The grass will narrow to a path, disappearing behind the spruce, thus giving the illusion that your yard is bigger and inviting people to explore." He suggested replacing our rotting white fence with



The rearranged planting of hydrangea, other white plants, and hosta (right) thoughtfully incorporates hydrangea from the neighbor's backyard (above) and artfully links the two spaces.



The reworked border in front of the garage (above) is a graceful medley of perennials, shrubs and annuals with more variety and interest than the original planting (center, left), which depended heavily on a single row of annual begonias for its impact. All existing plants were removed (below, left) before the bed was replanted.



Next we discussed the sunny garden in front of our two-story brick garage. "You have an attractive garage," noted Craig. "Let's not hide it but enhance it by keeping the plants lower here." He recommended two 'Dorothy Perkins' climbing roses trained onto copper trellises between the windows. "The height will come from the roses," he said. My Japanese maple stayed put in its protected niche between garage and spruce "because it looks so happy there."

The Process: Digging Time

When Craig's crew arrived, the day was crisp—40 degrees under a sunny spring sky. "Perfect weather for moving plants," he smiled. "Their foliage will stay cool, but the sun will warm the soil to help the roots take hold." His eight-man crew dug, lifted, and placed every emerging perennial onto huge tarps laid out on the turf.

After the gardens were cleared of virtually all plants, the crew added a 2-foot gravel path behind the garage garden and extended that border's planting space. Craig used partially composted bark mulch to augment the soil. "It adds porosity and year-round aeration, so you'll get proper drainage in your heavy clay soil."

By day two, Craig, Russ, and Jim Hathorn, the installation supervisor, were crouched over the piles of perennials, collaborating to identify every plant, referring to my plant list and seasonal photos as needed before placing each in just the right location. "The photographs are really important for anyone considering doing this," said Craig. "Plant markers are okay, but they tend to fade and break."

Combinations: Culture, Care, Color

Craig and crew divided my tallest, sun-loving prairie-like plants to add to the 460 square feet of new garden space

a rustic picket to blend in visually with the rustic cedar fence and trellises in my neighbors' yard. "It will add texture as a backdrop to the garden and not compete for color."

He also wanted to make three of the new fence posts 7 feet tall, with chain looping between them. At the center post, he'd plant the prolifically blooming climbing rose 'William Baffin', then transplant my two sweet autumn clematises at the base of the outside posts. Over time, these three would climb, swag, twist, and hang along stretches of chain. "You'll have a flowering fence—summer and fall—to visually cover the neighbor's garage."

With those basic structures in place, Craig then turned his attention to the former play area in which two towering spruces and a 10-foot hemlock command attention. "We're going to move your most statuesque plants to the back where they'll have the space they need," Craig said. "The 2-foot tall plants would look odd with 30-foot spruces, but your 8-foot Rudbeckia 'Herbstsonne' and 10-foot grasses will look elegant and relate to the tall background."

The Bergmann Touch

created by joining the two beds across the former play area. One zebra grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus'), two variegated miscanthus (*M. sinensis* 'Variegata'), a *Rudbeckia* 'Herbstsonne', *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen', and Hungarian Daisy (*Leucanthemella serotina*), each begat many more of themselves. These statuesque plants were set around the perimeter as the backdrop.

The crew divided six *Sedum* 'Autumn Joy' into 12 and three golden yarrow (*Achillea* 'Moonshine') into six, interspersing and nestling them together at the borders' edges because both plants have similar moisture needs. Mid-garden, Craig grouped several of my existing rugosa roses, 'Blanc double de Courbert' and 'Therese Bugnet,' to create the appearance of one large bush "because as singles they tend to look bony."

Stepping down from the back, Craig moved one white and one pink hardy hibiscus (*H. moschata*), the hot pink New England aster 'Alma Poschke', *Boltonia asteroides* 'Pink Beauty', and *Eupatorium* 'Chocolate', which has delicate white flowers on purple-maroon leaves, to brighten up the fall garden.

Craig also wanted to introduce more woody plants throughout to add "architecture" as well as foliage color. First he transplanted three 'Tardiva' hydrangeas from my front yard to the east border, creating additional height and coverage of the neighbors' garage and driveway. Then he added three 'Wine and Roses' weigela and the smoke bush *Cotinus coggyria* 'Royal Purple' to this prairie section of the garden.

The woody structure and deep purple leaves of these shrubs were echoed across the yard at the west end of the garage garden, where he planted a ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diablo').

With "good horticultural combinations" as his mantra, Craig transplanted several tea and shrub roses near the ninebark "because they have the same moisture needs." He placed more roses between the mid and back range of this garden, along with monarda and phlox. "The air circulation provided by the gravel path behind the border, and the heat reflected off the brick garage will help keep the plants dry and help control their susceptibility to fungi." This grouping of plants with similar needs also made preventive maintenance easier and more efficient for me.

Craig planted daylilies near daffodils "because as they grow they'll cover the bulbs' withering leaves." Grasses were planted near oriental poppies to provide the same type of coverage. He exhorted me to use annuals to cover faded perennials rather than crowding more perennials into the area. In the garage garden we chose tall cosmos to hide the monarda, hot pink pentas 'Jessica' in front of pink mallow, and 3-foot-tall ageratum 'Horizon' interspersed throughout the whole border to add bursts of lavender. "When in doubt about color," advised Craig, "think blue or purple. They're actually very neutral and go with everything."

While culture and care were key in creating combinations, color was always a consideration. "The east back section has your hottest yellow colors, but the colors in your

garage garden are more pinks, blues, lavenders, and red, with just a touch of yellow." Craig sprinkled my 25 dwarf daylilies 'Happy Returns' throughout the length of the garden. "Little spots of yellow that trickle around the borders' edge allow it to stand out at twilight."

The shadiest part of my garden lies under my neighbors' huge Norway maple next to which they have a grouping of 'Annabelle' hydrangeas. Craig added several 'Annabelles' to my side to create a mass of bushes and blooms tumbling together over the fence. "Now it won't look like 'my side-your side'," he explained. Their fat white flowers also worked well with the color scheme. "Here we focus on white, soft lavenders, pinks, green variegated—no golden oranges."

He again zeroed in on horticultural combinations by putting plants together that lived happily in a partially shady, moist environment. He added several *Cimicifuga simplex* 'The Pearl' to existing *Cimicifuga atropurpurea* at the back. By fall, all nodded their white fluffy tails behind and around the groupings he had made of my plethora of hosta, their stiff white flowers a perky foil to the languid, bobbing "snakeroot" blooms.

At the front of this border, he added five *Kerria japonica* 'Picta.' His crew created five woodland asters (*A. divaricatus*) out of one and tucked them in and around the kerria. In late summer, the asters' tiny white, daisy-like flowers blend with the delicate variegated leaves of the kerrias to create a charming, bright glow in the deep shade.

Mid-border, my five *Chelone oblique* with their sturdy little "turtleheads" add to a kaleidoscope of pinks in autumn. Spicy *Persicaria* 'Firetail' looks gorgeous grouped up against the fence behind the variegated pink shades of fall-blooming anemone. They are tucked under the sturdy 'Tardiva' hydrangeas, whose flowers change from bright white in August to pretty pink by October.

Besides the big picture, Craig also looked for what he called "vignette-y kinds of places"—like the little cubby in a corner created by my porch's stone wall and edged with flagstone. It's a little low lying and holds water. "Ligularia likes wet feet," he noted, so there they went, along with gooseneck loosestrife, whose spreading habit is contained by the walk and wall.

Reflections: The New View

Craig's attention to details like this, as well as the grand scheme of a garden, is one of the key ingredients that make his work so artistically appealing. But he also believes that a truly beautiful garden is a *living*, three-dimensional work of art that won't thrive without meeting the horticultural requirements of each plant. From our first encounter more than 25 years ago, it was obvious that Craig's passion for plants extended not just to relishing their beauty but meeting their needs. In giving my garden a facelift, he helped me bring a new vigor to my long-time friends. They seem so much happier now that they're in the company of like-minded souls, in environments that nurture and nourish them, and show them off at their most glorious, with space to breathe and room to grow. 🌱