



# A Tree Farm Garden

By Judy Nauseef

**I drove east toward Tipton, Iowa on a sunny summer's day through rolling fields of soybeans and corn and past barns and homes on farmsteads. The directions had me turning onto a gravel road and then soon again into the lane of my destination.** Although I had glowing descriptions of this property, I was totally unprepared for where I ended up. I entered a shady oasis that could have been from a previous time.

Over 25 years ago, Dave and Janel Stephens bought 35-acres of cornfields and woods and put up a log cabin house, using many reclaimed materials from Midwest farms and businesses. They began planting trees and eventually qualified for the Iowa Tree Farm Program, which

began in 1955 with the mission of promoting and recognizing stewardship of Iowa's woodland resources. Janel said that she never gets used to how the trees get as large as they do.

Becoming a Tree Farm encourages the owners to become knowledgeable about their existing woods and the trees they add to it. Janel told me that they landscaped around the house "a little area at a time," pushing back the woodland edge behind the house, and adding hydrangeas and other plants along the perimeter.

Over time, the shade has taken over Janel's vegetable and perennial gardens, but that is fine with her, as she enjoys how the garden evolves. She is a member of the Tipton Garden Club and her knowledge of plants and gardening is well known. Her interests include trees, shrubs, perennials, and native plants.

**In this garden, Asiatic lilies (*Lilium asiaticum*), iris (*Iris* sp.), solitary clematis (*Clematis integrifolia*) and cleome (*Cleome hassleriana*) and a stone cylinder gather in front of old wire gates. The tangerine lily is Coral Sunrise (*Lilium* 'Coral Sunrise'). A wooden trellis in the background displays art objects.**



Dave's garden, in the memory of Janel's husband, greets visitors to their home at the end of the lane. A Heritage oak (*Quercus macrocarpa* x *robur*) anchors the garden. At its base is a Broadmoor juniper (*Juniperus sabina* 'Broadmoor'). Janel included found metal art in this vignette.







A border, seen from the back deck, defines the perimeter of the lawn and the edge of the woods. Hostas (*Hosta* spp.) and Annabelle hydrangeas (*Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle') brighten the garden and ostrich ferns (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) add wonderful texture.







**Left to right:** An old wheel barrow has new life as a vessel for a miniature home and garden in the style of the larger garden.

The first flower garden along the lane includes sedum (*Hylotelephium spectabile*), Stella de Oro daylily (orange) (*Hemerocallis 'Stella de Oro'*), Tiny Tot daylily (small and yellow) (*Hemerocallis 'Tiny Tot'*), Eenie Allegro daylily (bright orange) (*Hemerocallis 'Eenie Allegro'*), Moonbeam coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata 'Moonbeam'*), Siberian irises (*Iris sibirica*) and the annual cleome (*Cleome hassleriana*). Cages composed of old metal gates and curved wire panels protect the plants.

A potting area between the house and garage is full of potted plants, including bright annuals. Old wash tubs and tractor seats fill new roles. Metal watering cans fit right in. The walls are covered with decorative objects.



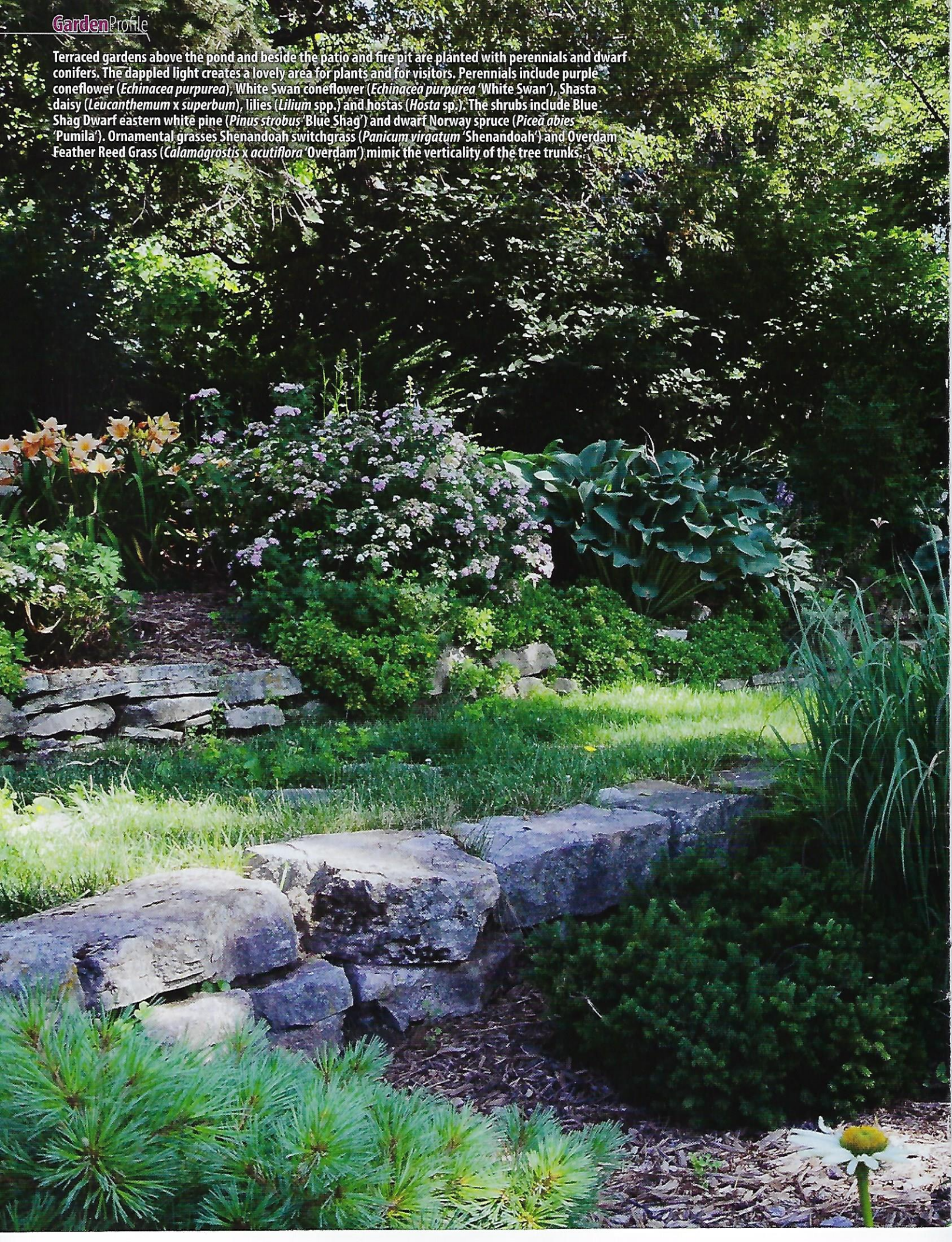
To the east of the lane, they planted a park-like area rimmed with trees. Down the hill from the house, they built a large pond, which provides spectacular views and a home for wildlife. Stone steps lead through a terrace on the slope to a patio with a fire pit that provides seating under the trees. Terraces are planted with perennials and shrubs. The shrubs lower the maintenance and also provide winter interest. In this sunny area she has planted a group of dwarf conifers. Janel has replaced original railroad tie walls with limestone, and the process of repairing and maintaining the hardscape continues.

A shade garden of hostas and ferns greets the visitor at the front of the house. Janel has used upside down cages or baskets to protect plants from rabbits, deer, and ground squirrels. Old chain link gates support plants in the garden. Janel has a wonderful collection of found art, items from old farms, and antique shops. They decorate the gardens around the house, adding color and brightness in the shade. An old wheelbarrow hosts a village of miniatures. Her imagination creates playful combinations of plants and objects. All of these ideas put Janel's signature on the garden.



## GardenProfile

Terraced gardens above the pond and beside the patio and fire pit are planted with perennials and dwarf conifers. The dappled light creates a lovely area for plants and for visitors. Perennials include purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), White Swan coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea* 'White Swan'), Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum*), lilies (*Lilium* spp.) and hostas (*Hosta* sp.). The shrubs include Blue Shag Dwarf eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Blue Shag') and dwarf Norway spruce (*Picea abies* 'Pumila'). Ornamental grasses Shenandoah switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah') and Overdam Feather Reed Grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Overdam') mimic the verticality of the tree trunks.

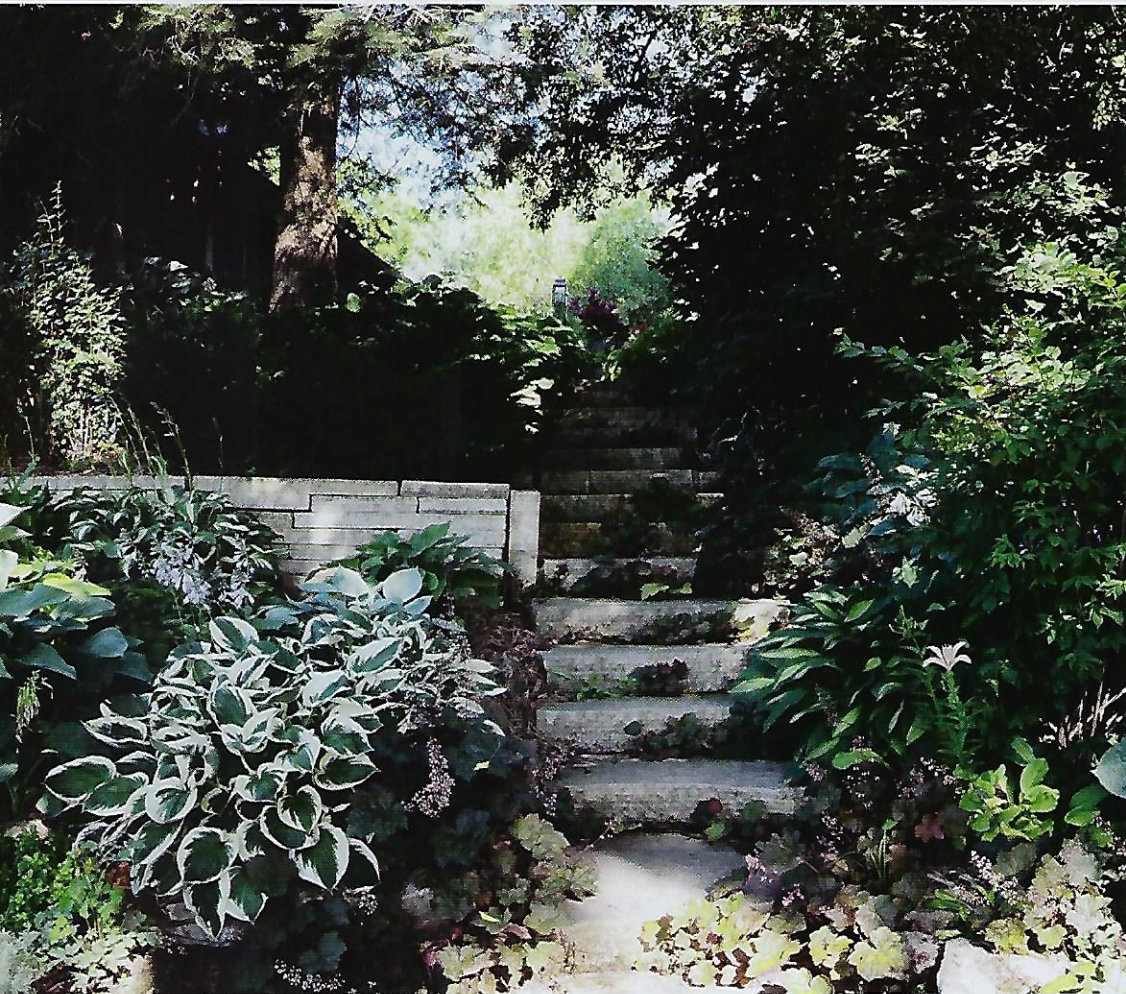
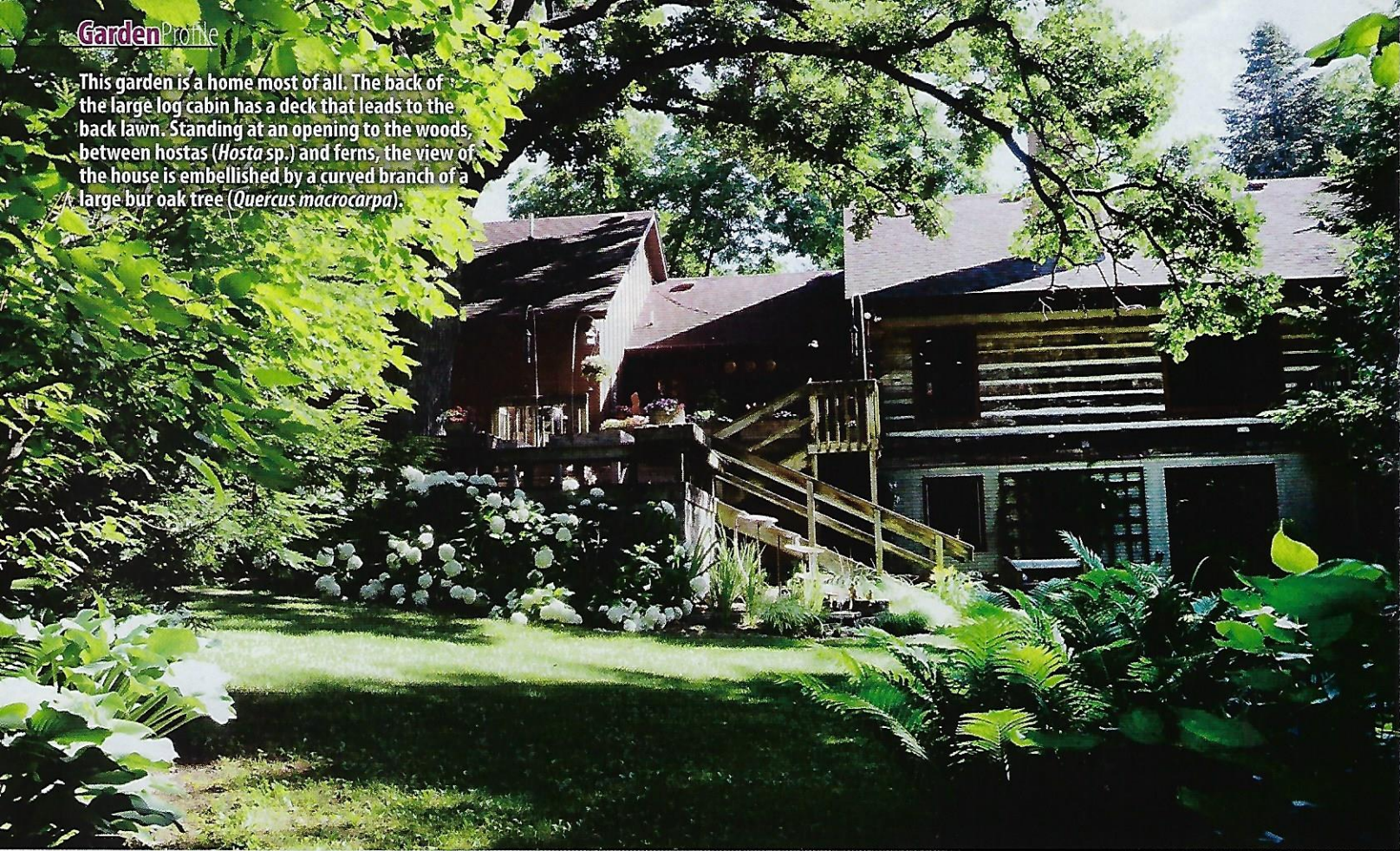








This garden is a home most of all. The back of the large log cabin has a deck that leads to the back lawn. Standing at an opening to the woods, between hostas (*Hosta* sp.) and ferns, the view of the house is embellished by a curved branch of a large bur oak tree (*Quercus macrocarpa*).



Janel created plantings to honor family members, including one for Dave and ones for each grandchild. Weathered-wood signs have become part of the landscape. A path leads to the house where one of their daughters now lives with her family. More than a tree farm, this garden is home. ♡

Judy Nauseef is a landscape designer and garden writer living in Iowa. Her website is [judynauseeflandscapedesign.com](http://judynauseeflandscapedesign.com). Her latest book is *Gardening with Native Plants in the Upper Midwest: Bringing the Tallgrass Prairie Home*.

◀ Limestone steps lead from a patio above the pond up to the house. Limestone terraced walls hold the slope and provide planting areas for shrubs and perennials. Hostas (*Hosta* sp.) and coral bells (*Heuchera* sp.) soften the hardscape. The hostas with green leaves with a white edging are Minuteman. Red October is planted up the steps and wall. Striptease hosta is on the right of the steps. The front right shrub is a burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*) and the large shrub in the back is a Koreanspice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*).