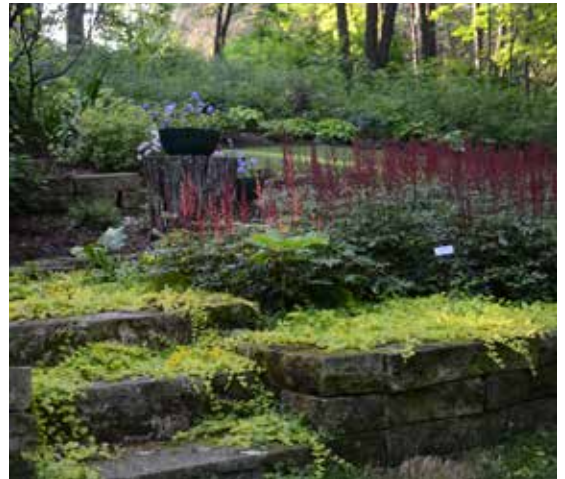


30 YEARS IN THE MAKING: A SHOW GARDEN

As visitors walk up into the garden, they observe mounded shapes exhibiting a wide range of color and texture. 'Biokova' (*Geranium x cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo') blooms white, and yellow-leaved 'Miracle' coral bell (*Heuchera* 'Miracle') brighten the first steps. Repeating light green and purple foliage, 'Palace Purple' coral bell (*Heuchera* 'Palace Purple') leads visitors into the lawn. The shrubs are 'Royal Purple' smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple') on the left and weeping hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis* 'Pendula') on the right. Mary Lowder prunes the smoke bushes into dense, rounded shapes.

ARDEN



Below the deck, limestone steps and a path lead into the lawn. Gold creeping Jenny (*Lysmachia nummularia* 'Aurea') captures the texture of the shining leaves in the trees and mimics the splashes of sun on the lawn. Red 'Fanal' *Astilbe* repeats the color of the shed at the end of the yard.

When Mary and Ken Lowder bought their 2 ½ acre woods 30 years ago, they confess they did not have a clue of how to garden. They must have gotten the hang of it, though, because in 2014, their property was a display garden for the American Hosta Society Convention, which was held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The Lowders began gardening by removing the existing landscaping and 20 softwood trees, leaving the hardwoods. The acreage today consists of areas of sun, partial shade and full shade, a gardener's dream, except for the large population of deer and rabbits.

I met the Lowders in 1998, soon after they had new terraces built to replace failing ones in the hill on which the house was set. I designed gardens to fill the terraces, which over the years the owners have revised, refined and embellished with their increasing knowledge and interest in plants, particularly Hosta, daylily (*Hemerocallis* hybrids), and astilbe (*Astilbe* spp.).

The Lowders' greatest challenges include keeping at bay the shade and the many deer and rabbits that visit the garden. How does Mary garden with deer observing her daily? With diligence. In addition to owning dogs (Mary is also a dog trainer), which deter the deer, Mary uses a battery-powered deer zapper, deer and rabbit repellents and Havahart traps. The deer repellent needs to be used, starting in early spring and reapplied after rain.

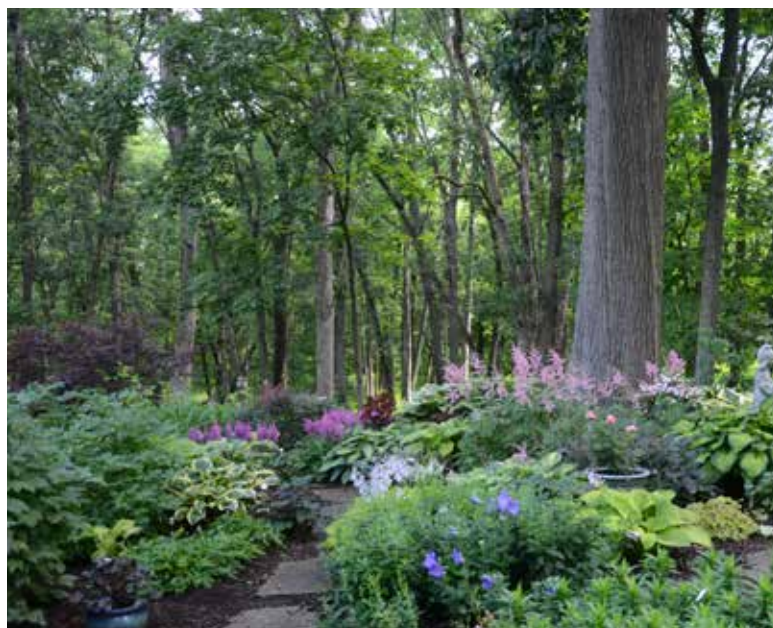


The entrance to both the gardens and the house offers seating in the shade. Bermuda Beach Petunia fills the pots while a red-leaved Emperor 1 Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Wolff') reaches over the bench. 'Gold Heart' bleeding heart (*Lamprocaprios spectabilis* 'Gold Heart') draws the distant, sun-lit trees into the picture.



Above the terraces, the garden is packed with thriving plants. On the right, 'Nirecens' hosta (*H. 'Nirecens'*) anchors this photo. The combination of 'Royal Purple' smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple') and Pink Visions astilbe (*A. chinensis* 'Visions') delights the viewer.

Paths through the bed allow visitors to stroll slowly and provide access to the gardeners tending the garden. A northern pin oak (*Quercus palustris*) provides open shade for a mixture of plants, including short and tall *Astilbe*, variegated *Hosta* and balloon flower (*Platycodon grandiflorus*). 'Lunar Orbit' hosta (*H. 'Lunar Orbit'*) fronts the small fountain.

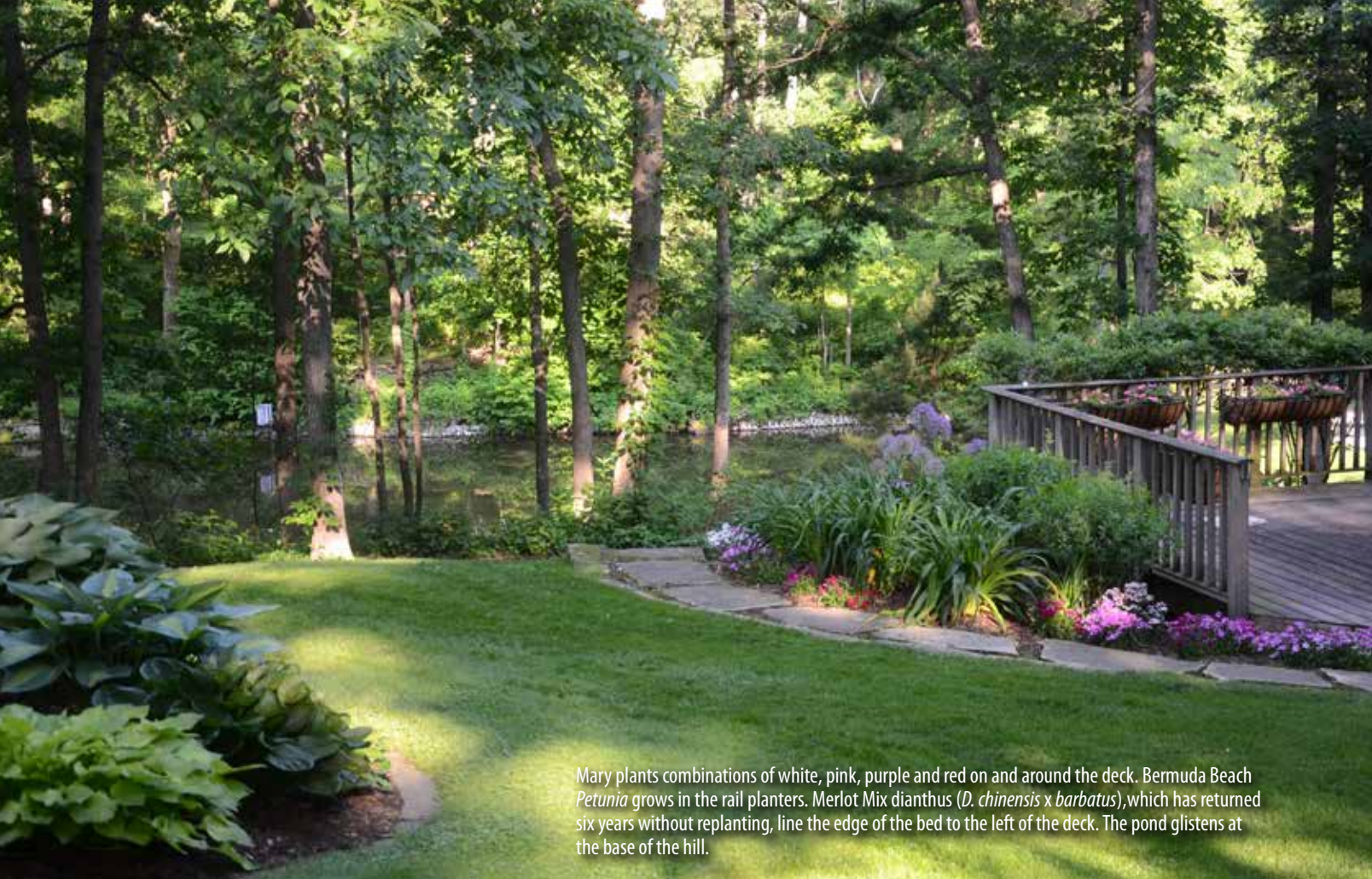


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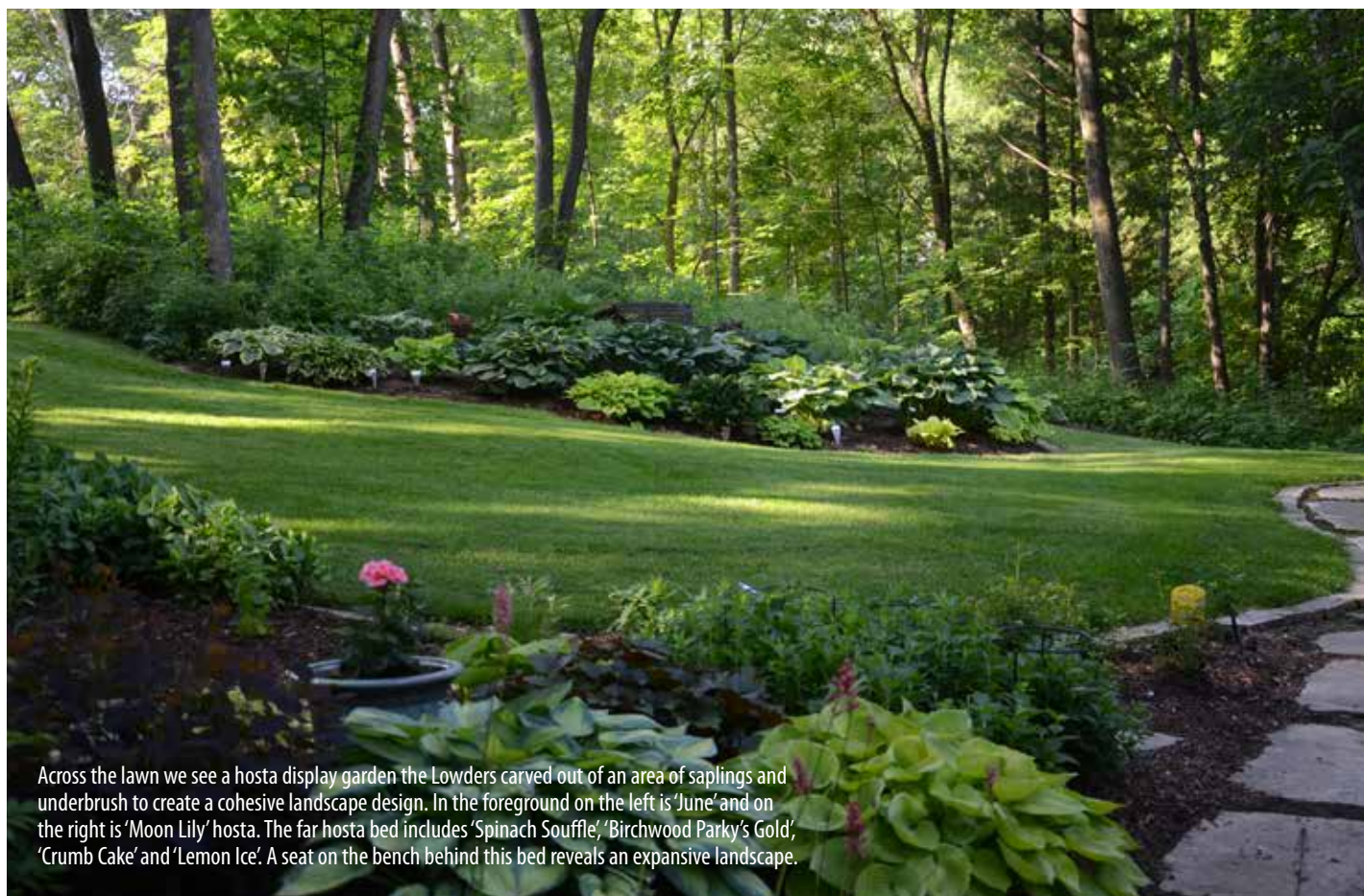
Mary entered the world of hosta enthusiasts when joining the Harshbarger Hosta Society, a long-time group of gardeners in Central Iowa. She then became a Master Gardener, increasing her knowledge and success growing all kinds of plants. Mary uses astilbe to add substance and color to the garden. Blooming in late spring, their foliage continues to shine into late summer, creating wonderful contrasts with hosta. Two of her favorite hosta are 'Clear Fork River Valley' and 'Paradigm'. The first is large, with corrugated dark green, rounded leaves and the second, also large, has thick corrugated gold leaves with blue-green margins. Both have lavender flowers.

Mary's daylily collection mainly comes from old homes. She has Frederick McDowell and Bill Blair plants. These two men grew, bred and sold high quality daylilies in the Iowa City area for many years. Mary is after the choicest of plants for their beauty and staying power. There are no excuses for plants in her garden. In her designs, each plant plays its unique role.

From the Lowders' screened porch, the views of the woods and the gardens are spectacular and soothing. Between the sounds of birds and insects and the occasional fish jumping in the community pond, I thought I was on holiday. ♡



Many plants combinations of white, pink, purple and red on and around the deck. Bermuda Beach *Petunia* grows in the rail planters. Merlot Mix dianthus (*D. chinensis* x *barbatus*), which has returned six years without replanting, line the edge of the bed to the left of the deck. The pond glistens at the base of the hill.



Across the lawn we see a hosta display garden the Lowders carved out of an area of saplings and underbrush to create a cohesive landscape design. In the foreground on the left is 'June' and on the right is 'Moon Lily' hosta. The far hosta bed includes 'Spinach Souffle', 'Birchwood Parky's Gold', 'Crumb Cake' and 'Lemon Ice'. A seat on the bench behind this bed reveals an expansive landscape.



(Above) The plantings in the terrace behind the house form a tapestry of leaf shape, color and texture. They obscure the aging limestone walls and paths that add a sense of timelessness to the garden. Visitors find more hosta in the landscape, including 'Royal Standard' in a mass planting on the lower left and the golden 'Sum and Substance' on the right. Texture comes from astilbes 'Ostrich Plume', which is pink, and 'Avalanche', which blooms white. Shrubs at the top are from left, a climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*), oak leaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and 'Autumn Moon' Japanese maple (*Acer shirasawanum* 'Autumn Moon').



Another view of the back terrace shows its proximity to the pond, which visitors pass when approaching the house. The Lowders used Turfstone pavers to stabilize the lawn ramps on both sides of the house. 'June' hosta is in the foreground, with golden 'Fort Knox' and 'Maui Buttercups' hosta in the center right. 'Sagae' hosta is at the far left edge. To the right of the steps variegated Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum odoratum* 'Variegatum') creates a low hedge. The plants behind 'June' hostas are tree peonies (*Paeonia suffruticosa*). 'Palace Purple' coral bells spread within the bed.



The lawn sweeps around both sides of this bed to highlight patches of golden sun that reflect on the light green variegations in *Hosta*. The very large hosta is 'Sagae' (*H. 'Sagae'*). The Lowders added a red garden storage shed to obscure the view of their neighbor's large barn. The shed matches the red tones in the garden.