

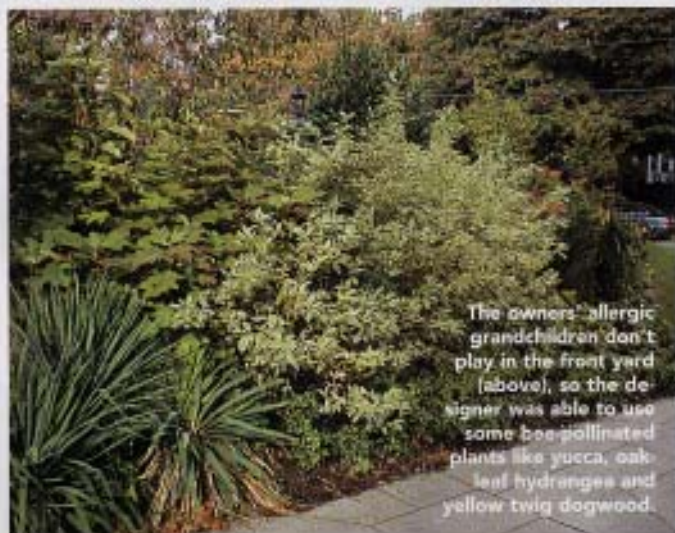


bee wary

What's the buzz? Almost none in this bee-scarce garden created by landscape designer Louis Raymond for a Rhode Island couple. By Jorge S. Arango

Had Rimsky-Korsakov been allergic to bee stings, his "Flight of the Bumble Bee" might have played more like a tortured, atonal bit of Schoenberg than a merrily antic flight through a flower bed. But the buzzing of bees, the sound the composer imitated with violins, can actually induce nightmares in the wife of the couple who owns this Providence property, as well as in her daughter and grandchildren, all of whom are allergic to apiarian venom. The last thing they wanted was a garden full of sweet-smelling roses that invited the risk of anaphylactic shock.

Enter Louis Raymond, owner of Renaissance Gardening Limited in Hopkinton, Rhode Island, who devised a strategy for planting the lush garden the home and its owners wanted, but one that wasn't an open call to stinging insects. The first task was to remove all existing plants on the 17,000-square-foot lot, including every blade of grass. "It was a total gut," says Raymond. Next he created a play area for the grandchildren in the backyard by leveling the land—no small feat on a steep property—then planted it with flora pollinated by vectors other than bees. >



The owners' allergic grandchildren don't play in the front yard (above), so the designer was able to use some bee-pollinated plants like yucca, oak-leaf hydrangeas and yellow twig dogwood.



The designer's research led to some fascinating discoveries. For instance, he learned that magnolias evolved before bees, which means beetles handle the pollination. That left him free to plant cultivars that were hardy this far north (*Magnolia grandiflora* 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' and 'D.D. Blancher'). The ground-level blossoms of European ginger (*Asarum europaeum*) are pollinated by, of all things, slugs. And ferns worked well because "they antedate the whole notion of pollination."

Adhering strictly to the alternate-vector idea had its limits, however, something Raymond remedied by mixing in bee-pollinated plants that bloom before or after the grandchildren's primary outdoor play season. To ensure privacy, for example, the owners wanted enormous holly trees (*Ilex* 'Nellie R. Stevens') around the lot, which Raymond knew would conveniently blossom in early May. By pollarding or coppicing other plants, he could not only control their size, but also prevent them from blooming at all, as in the case of false acacias (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia'). "Some of these plants probably do attract bees," Raymond allows, "but they're just not in the garden at the same time you're there."

Clockwise from top left: Yellow robinia spills over grasses and *Acer japonicum* 'Green Cascade'; a pathway features magnolias, boxwood and dwarf bayberry; a grouping of ivy, bamboo and Japanese anemone.

Raymond allowed himself greater liberty with the front yard because its sharp incline and proximity to the road meant the owners only walked through it on their way to the door and the kids never played there. That explains the presence of yellow twig dogwoods (*Cornus sericea* 'Silver & Gold'), with their pretty variegated leaves; cherry laurels (*Prunus laurocerusus*); oakleaf hydrangea; and other bee-friendly plants. The designer even used bee magnets like hostas and yuccas, which are easy to de-bud, to expand his palette and repertoire of textures.

The approach Raymond took with this garden, in fact, ended up being not unlike the one he uses in others. "It's still good advice to concentrate on foliage, form and texture, and have the flowers be an extra," he says. "This property is full of plants for season-long and year-round interest. The last thing these gardens make you say is, 'Golly, it's too bad they don't have any flowers.'"

Raymond's dictum is one even the owners, self-described horticultural novices, can appreciate. "The garden is gorgeous," says the wife. "The color palette is so extraordinary! It's every shade of green, with some white and yellow. And I can honestly say I've never seen a bee." ☘