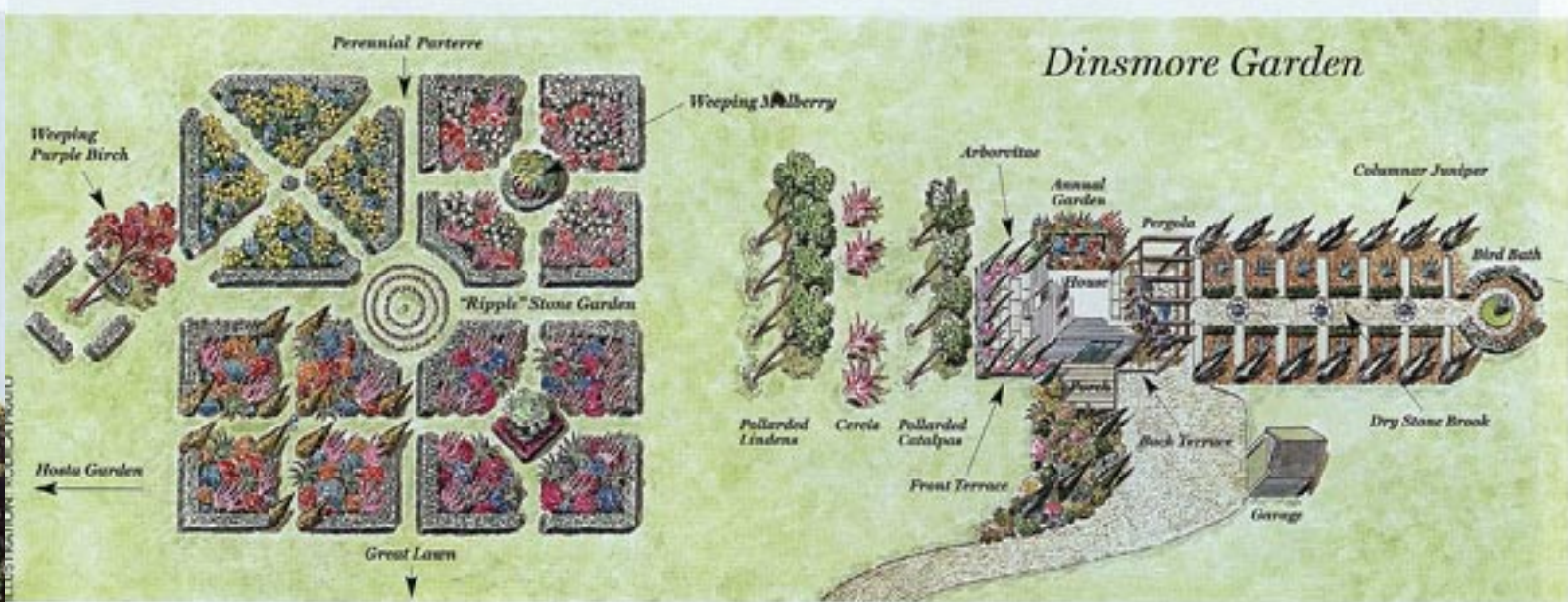


THE LUSH LIFE

USING TREES, SHRUBS AND FLOWERS LIKE BRICKS AND MORTAR, JAMES DINSMORE CREATED BOTANICAL ARCHITECTURE.



Golden arborvitae anchor the X-shaped blue-and-gold perennial garden, which is bordered on one side with low walls of spiraea. The cobalt "pagoda" at right was created from three upside-down glazed ceramic planters. Opposite (from left): Yarrow, heliopsis and delphiniums continue the blue-and-gold theme; instead of water, this "fountain" features a weeping mulberry tree that drips into a pool of blue nepeta.





In the circle-shaped garden (this page) are white *Hydrangea* 'Annabel,' pink nepeta, spiraeas and eupatorium. Opposite: Gardener James Dinsmore designed the diamond-shaped perennial garden to showcase such plants as maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis gracillimus*), meadow rue (*thalictrum*) and blue and pink nepeta. In its center is a Japanese tricolored willow "fountain," surrounded by deep red barberry (*Berberis* 'Crimson Pygmy').



If a fountain were reincarnated as a plant, what kind would it be? This is not a metaphysical trick question; it's something James Dinsmore contemplates every day. The leafy and flowery correlatives to fountains, columns, walls, balustrades and flooring are of paramount concern to this landscape architect, who fenced in six of his seven-plus acres in Olivebridge, New York, to create an enormous garden of some 20 rooms, the space divided and decorated with hundreds of trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals.

After Dinsmore built his house atop the property's highest elevation, he immediately began experimenting with the landscape's architectural elements. Outside the front door is a terrace, which he wanted bordered in classical fashion with columns and a low balustrade. Rather than marble and stone,

he planted tall arborvitae as columns and *Spiraea* 'Anthony Waterer' as the balustrade. Beyond the terrace is an impressive perennial parterre, each section a different shape (diamond, circle, X and cross) and color scheme—blue-pink-purple, white-pink-red, blue-gold and orange-yellow-red, respectively.

"Because I didn't have the money to run water features all over the property," says Dinsmore, "I tried to create floral fountains." So, for instance, in one quadrant of the parterre—each quadrant measures about 60 feet square—Dinsmore planted a ring of dwarf boxwood to approximate the low rim of a fountain. At center is a weeping mulberry tree, its arched branches cascading into a pool of blue nepeta "water."

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From left: At the center of the lush perennial parterre is another "fountain," created with a circle of artfully placed stones; on the front terrace, a spiraea "balustrade" separates arborvitae "columns," which frame the view. Opposite: A stone "brook" inset with small pools of water runs through a "ravine" of Korean boxwood, irises and junipers.



Not

all of the property's "water features" are inspired by plant material. There's another "fountain" (above), where the quadrants of the perennial parterre meet—it's a birdbath filled with polished black stones, with a "jet" of vertical rock surrounded by a "ripple" of concentric smaller stones. Down the hill behind the house, a stone brook "babbls," so to speak, bisecting a "ravine" created with successively higher plantings: Korean boxwood, German bearded iris and, finally, columnar junipers ('Skyrocket').

Dinsmore admits to the unwieldy nature of his undertaking. "I, of course, love those English and French gardens that are divided into rooms marked out with neat yew hedges for which they employ six full-time hedge clippers," he laughs. Not possessing the gardening staffs of Sir Harold Nicholson and Vita Sackville-West or Cardinal Richelieu, for that matter,

Dinsmore instead selected hedge material that would grow to the approximate height and proportion he needed. "I've never touched them with shears," he boasts of hedges of arborvitae and *Euonymus alata* (burning bush), though he admits a "fountain wall" of barberry (*Berberis* 'Crimson Pygmy') needs "occasional neatening." Though these days he tends the garden virtually solo, Dinsmore lured friends to weekend planting parties to set out the initial structure of trees and shrubs.

Letting hedges pursue their natural impulses softens the ornate structure of the garden, making it more relaxed and contemporary. Gone is the maintenance you'd expect from such an immense formal plan. Still, says Dinsmore of his ever-expanding project, "it's either amazing or insane." ❀
See Resources, last pages.

