



IN BRIEF

Name Monadnock Vistas.
What Private naturalistic garden composed of various meadows.
Where New Hampshire, USA.
Size 65 acres.
Soil Sandy loam over heavier clay.
Climate Long winters with deep snow, sun-drenched and cool summers.
Hardiness zone USDA 5a.

A meadow-like mix of grasses, coreopsis, echinacea, nepeta and perovskia creates a colourful tapestry in front of the house, which is framed by two, large *Gleditsia triacanthos* trees. Elsewhere in the garden tall trees are avoided so nothing obscures the views of Mount Monadnock and Pack Monadnock.

HARMONIOUS COLOUR

When Sharon and Brad Malt felt the garden around their New Hampshire weekend home needed a revamp they called in ZEN Associates to create a low-maintenance meadow that would sing with colour

WORDS TOVAH MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHS CLAIRE TAKACS



WE SIT ON THE
TERRACE AND LISTEN TO
A CRESCENDO OF BIRDS

Winters in New Hampshire can be long and cold, and when Sharon and Brad Malt first looked round the house that has now become their weekend bolthole from Boston, its garden was waist-deep in snow. When finally they got a glimpse of what lay beneath the snow they were a little disappointed. But no matter, they loved the house and its location, surrounded by mountain hiking trails, and besides when they first bought the house creating a garden seemed less important than providing open spaces for their two sons to play in. Eventually they might think about creating a garden for themselves, but not yet.

But the couple's dream of a garden in New Hampshire never went away and as their sons got older it became a more realistic possibility. In the Beacon Hill district of Boston, where the couple live during the week, Sharon joined the Beacon Hill Garden Club, and while sitting in club meetings with other garden enthusiasts, the talk of pollinators and creating wildlife-friendly habitats only intensified her longing for something other than grass-covered playing fields. "Suddenly, I needed flowers," she says.

Sharon also serves on the committees of several cultural, environmental and horticultural organisations in Boston, and through her involvement with one of these she met Peter White a partner in the Boston-based design and landscape architecture practice ZEN Associates. Sharon and Brad liked ZEN's landscape style and asked the practice to come up with a design for the area around the guest cottage of their New Hampshire home. Then a few years later in 2000 they invited the practice back to come up with an overall plan for the entire garden. The plan ZEN came up with transformed much of the 65 acres into a series of sprawling meadows that flow with ornamental grasses and swathes of loose, airy, perennials.

Paths now weave through the meadows, linking the various areas of the garden together and echo the network of hiking trails that surround the house. The 90m playing field the ▷

Turn to page 84 to continue

Clockwise from above

Close to the house a selection of shrubs and perennials, including *Picea pungens* 'Montgomery', *Pinus mugo*, *Cotinus* 'Grace', *Eutrochium purpureum* and *Perovskia atriplicifolia*, create a rich mix of colours and forms.

A large *Hydrangea paniculata* dominates the terrace in front of the house where in summer the Malts grow peonies and roses. In September echinacea and sedums add colour.

The stone wall in front of the terrace was designed to stand just above the planting of *Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue'. Lining the path in front is *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Nippon' along with several cultivars of *Hakonechloa*.



Making a meadow garden

Creating a naturalistic meadow that fits together as a cohesive whole means carefully working out in advance the ratio of different plants – especially when you're planting on a grand scale. Landscape architect Peter White used a minimum of 25 repeating plants per swathe of meadow, creating a soft, impressionistic feel that has a calming effect.

"When designing large landscapes using masses of ornamental grasses and perennials, I think about immersion in a scene of rapidly changing structure, colours and movement throughout the seasons," says Peter.

Good botanical knowledge is also important in creating a successful tapestry of plants. Familiarity with the heights and habits of each cultivar, enabled Peter to space the plants with their mature height in mind. For most plants this was around 60-90cm, while for the large grasses a space of around 1.2-1.5m was left between individual plants. Peter also ensured the paths between the beds were a minimum of 1.5m wide so that the paths never become completely swallowed up by the swathes of grasses when the meadow begins to gain height and volume.

Towards the east of the house is an area where the lawn is wider and more frame-like between the beds. Here the grasses mix with small shrubs and low-growing perennials chosen because they are hardy and able to hold their own in competition with the grass roots. The flowering perennials, in colours that reflect the hues of distant woods and mountains, add textural weave to the plumes of ornamental grasses, and neatly separate the tall grasses from the mown lawn. "The goal," says Peter, "is to glide through the garden, make it loose."

PERENNIALS NEED TO HOLD
THEIR OWN IN COMPETITION
WITH THE GRASS ROOTS



Tall clumps of grasses, including *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus' and low-growing shrubs and perennials fill irregularly shaped island borders, echoing both the colours and shapes of the distant mountains



PATHS WEAVE THROUGH THE MEADOWS, LINKING THE VARIOUS AREAS OF THE GARDEN TOGETHER

▷ Malts had originally laid out for their sons was retained as an open space that the family could use for star gazing and family get-togethers, but is now largely hidden from the house by swathes of meadow grass, which are planted in drifts that become more dense the further you get from the house. As the grasses change in colour and height throughout the season, the feel of the meadow evolves. “But they always feel like one fabric,” says Sharon.

To tie all the areas together ZEN built stone walls that are just tall enough to remain visible above the panicums, calamagrostis, pennisetums and miscanthus when they reach their full height in autumn. In front of the house an uninspiring collection of plants near the front door was replaced with a selection of shrubs and perennials, including *Spiraea x vanhouttei* ‘Renaissance’, *Vaccinium corymbosum*, *Cotinus* ‘Grace’ and *Hydrangea quercifolia* that link with the planting around the stone terrace the family love to use on summer evenings.

Behind the house a pond, complete with stream and waterfall, was built to improve a damp, boggy space, and surrounded with natives, such as iris, *Phlox subulata* and *Liatris spicata*. Elsewhere on the property the soil was fertile and well-drained and needed little amending thanks to the sandy loam on site.

Maintenance for the meadow is fairly minimal. Before the snow arrives in winter, Brad and Sharon cut back the ornamental grasses, and divide them every few years, which the both agree is far less labour-intensive than maintaining the previous lawns. And the new meadows have one other advantage for the grasses for the family: they have attracted a host of wildlife that brings the garden alive with sound. “It’s so different from the city here,” says Sharon. “We sit on the terrace and listen to a crescendo of birds.”

At this time of year, it is often dark by the time family arrive at the house on a Friday evening. Even so they like to head out into the meadows, and take some time to look up at the stars and soak up the harmonious sounds of the meadow. □

Clockwise from above

Tall *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Graziella’ and *Miscanthus sinensis* var. *condensatus* ‘Cabaret’ overlook a lawn close to the house.

A grass pathway winds its way down to a barn through a grove of birch trees. Islands of unmown grass around the trees create a link to the ornamental grasses in the meadows beyond.

The mix of *Calamagrostis x acutiflora*, *Panicum virgatum* and *Chasmanthium latifolium* becomes more dense the further you move from the house, in places almost covering the gravel path that leads to the former playing field.



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