



All of the rooms on the east side of the house have commanding views over the meadow garden toward the Pack Monadnock range in every season.

Grass Roots

Big swaths of ornamental grasses combine with native perennials and shrubs to form an autumnal tapestry.

MOST GARDENS start winding down as fall approaches, but at the country home of Brad and Sharon Malt, the gardens really shine in autumn. High on a ridgetop, the 64-acre property is surrounded by forest but has commanding views of both Mount Monadnock to the west and Pack Monadnock to the east. “We are so lucky that our view is mostly trees and landscape,” Sharon says. “The unspoiled vistas of Mount and Pack Monadnock never grow old.”

“I relax as soon as we turn up the driveway,” says Brad, speaking of the winding lane that climbs through the woods to the hilltop location. On the left is a reconstructed barn built on an 18th-century timber frame salvaged from Rumney, New Hampshire. Its bottle-shaped weathervane gives a clue to the tasting room and wine cellar in the basement. The rambling Cape Cod-style house, originally built in 1931, has had many additions over the years, opening views to the outdoors and mak-

ing it more comfortable for family and guests. A large stone-walled patio in the front welcomes visitors. “We do wine tastings all year long, but fall is a lovely time to have guests up, hike, cook fall meals and enjoy the wine cellar,” Sharon says.

Instead of a high-maintenance front lawn, across the driveway from the house is a field of ornamental grasses and perennials. “With our other house located in the city (Boston), we wanted this landscaping to speak to the informality of

By Robin Sweetser | Photography by Joe Valentine



On a frosty fall morning, silvery plumes of *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silver Feather' contrast with the colorful foliage of the surrounding trees.



Fall-blooming Japanese anemone 'Honorine Jobert' thrives in dappled shade near the guest house.



Native arrowwood viburnum has already been stripped of its berries by migrating songbirds who are drawn to the seedheads of the ornamental grasses as well.

the countryside and blend naturally with our more remote habitat,” says Brad. Adds Sharon: “I saw the ornamental grasses when I was touring gardens in Chicago with the Garden Club of America and I loved the wildness of them.”

They called on landscape architect Peter White of ZEN Associates to come up with a plan that would incorporate ornamental grasses into their landscape.

“Sharon wanted to eliminate the lawn,” says White, who designed the landscaping. “She felt there was just too much mowed grass, so we explored plantings that would fill large spaces and give seasonal change. The tall grasses were perfect for that.”

Big swaths of miscanthus, fountain grass, switchgrass, panicums and sea oats were combined with some perennials and shrubs, most of them native, to form

▶ GREEN SPACE

a tapestry.” Meandering paths through the billowing grasses lead past flowering shrubs and perennials including Russian sage, asters, coneflowers, nepeta, coreopsis, rudbeckia and Joe-Pye-weed, and emerge overlooking the 300-foot-long playing field.

A rail fence planted in places with hydrangeas, spirea, peonies and iris and punctuated with groups of white birches outlines the field. Downhill, on the next terraced level, is the fenced-in vegetable garden with raised beds and an orchard.

“We planted the fruit trees, mostly apples, about 15 years ago and they are something I am very proud of,” says Sharon. “Once we started focusing on native plants, pollination was improved and our production of fruit skyrocketed.” Now they have enough fruit to share, providing bushels of apples to employees of the



Above: Neatly mowed paths between the island beds bring order to the meadow garden behind the house, where glowing white birches and silver miscanthus stand out even on a cloudy day.

Top: An inviting path across from the house beckons you to step into the grass-filled garden and see what lies ahead. Landscape architect Peter White says he designed it for meandering.



Early morning sun lights up the feathery panicles of *Calamagrostis*. Soon the entire garden will be bathed in bright sunlight.

Huntington Theatre Company in Boston, an organization the Malts have been involved with for years.

Hidden away from the house, down a winding path through the woods, is a charming guest cottage complete with a swimming pool, a hot tub, an outdoor



Members of the Garden Conservancy, Brad and Sharon Malt have opened their garden to the public in the past during the Open Days program.

kitchen and a court area for basketball and pickleball. “The guest house is a great example of the Malts’ love of landscape and people. They made this a private retreat for friends, family and their dogs to use,” says White, who sited the house and designed the landscaping. “The planting here is quite informal, and a relaxed feeling comes through.” Surrounded by native plantings including clethra, serviceberry, ninebark, viburnum, asclepias and both high-bush and low-bush blueberries, it is a beautiful spot to watch the sun set behind Mount Monadnock.

A member of the board of directors of Native Plant Trust, Sharon says that the organization has taught her a lot about the value of native plants.

At the rear of the main house, views of the Pack Monadnock range are visible from the pergola-covered stone terrace, breakfast room and screened porch. “To soften the amount of lawn, we planted big stands of perennials and grasses,”

White says. Use of repeating plants adds continuity but also creates a dramatic effect year-round. Wide grass paths weave between island beds of tall ornamental grasses and other perennials leading down the slope to the pond below. “The pond is a destination that invites you to walk around the beds and enjoy the views from different angles,” says White.

“In the fall we look forward to the changing of the season and the multitude of colors of the trees on the mountains. The garden also takes on a different personality with the tall grasses blowing in the wind,” says Sharon. “I find fall in New Hampshire a very exciting time of year when the palette on the mountainside changes continually and the garden assumes a wonderful new identity.” **NHH**

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