


A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white sleeveless top and blue jeans, is walking away from the camera on a light-colored gravel path. To her left, a small black and white dog is walking. The path leads towards a large body of water, likely a bay or lake, under a blue sky with scattered clouds. On the left side of the path, there are lush green trees and bushes. On the right side, there are more green plants and a small wooden dock extending into the water. In the background, a tall white structure, possibly a lighthouse or a tower, is visible, with several thin cables or ropes hanging from its top. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, with a focus on nature and a coastal setting.

coastal style

Mature black locusts and apple trees frame water views and the Grammers' restored 1890s house (opposite) in their "grand but not snooty" 2.5-acre garden in Mahone Bay, NS.

romance island



surrounded by windy waters
and hungry deer, two novice gardeners
nurture a resilient turn-of-the-century
garden on a nova scotia inlet

by stephanie whittaker
photography by janet kimber



Punctuating the middle bed below, “The Three Graces,” an arrangement of three stones from the old house foundation is surrounded by low-growing perennials and shrubs that can withstand the gusty, salt-laden winds.

When Cygi and Gregory Grammer bought

their 1890s home in picturesque Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, 14 years ago, they were drawn to the inlet with 365 islands by their love of the sea. Little did they know how much influence the strong winds whipping off the water, not to mention the resident deer, would have on the design of their dream garden.

The first-time gardeners were ready to sink their teeth into a horticultural project while also renovating their wood-clad home, built in classic Nova Scotia style with a protruding front dormer (known as a “Lunenburg bump”). “I wanted a garden in the style of the grand estates I had seen on the Maine seacoast, grand but not snooty,” says Gregory Grammer, an interior decorator. He also wanted to preserve the turn-of-the-century look of the house and the garden.

Their home sits on a 20-foot rise, and the property is surrounded on three sides by water, a definite plus when it comes to scenery. The downside is that it is also windy, which—the Grammers learned the hard way—eliminates the possibility of growing tall flowers. “Sunflowers and foxgloves would get knocked over,” says Grammer. “The only perennials that withstood the wind were lupines, because in the Maritimes they grow wild in clusters and that protects them.”

Good thing Grammer wanted a long-term garden project rather than “instant gratification from annuals” as he puts it. He admits to dragging his wife into this venture. “She didn’t




Bronze sculptures of Christopher Robin, Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet greet the children at the start of a path. OPPOSITE: Swaths of creamy *Sedum*, magenta-flowered cranesbills, lady’s mantle and pink-toned *Persicaria bistorta* create a textured carpet. Grammer also grows lots of herbs because they’re not appetizing to deer.

know where I was going with it. When she looked at the stark landscape before we started, all she could see was work. I saw opportunity.”

And in the beginning, the garden did look like a “moonscape.” Defining assets included a few century-old black locusts and apple trees behind the house, and a handful of deer that had taken up residence on the 2.5-acre lot. One hidden treasure: within the remains of two 200-year-old, four-foot-high stone walls that once formed the footings of an 18th-century barn was what Grammer soon called “black gold.” “The soil inside the walls

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Baltic ivy (*Hedera helix* var. *baltica*) festoons a tree and surrounds specimen plants such as the small-leaved 'Ramapo' rhododendron. OPPOSITE LEFT: A garden shed, which perfectly matches the house style, is adorned with a trellis smothered in the purple-blue blooms of *Clematis* 'Jackmanii' (opposite right).

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to go with the romantic concept
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inspiration notes

easy groundcovers

Five deer-resistant (generally) perennial groundcovers that tolerate shady conditions and root competition found under trees.

1. Barrenwort (*Epimedium* spp.): This tidy plant has mitre-shaped leaves (it's also called bishop's hat) often tinged with crimson or bronze. Small airy flowers in white, pink, red or yellow appear in spring. Height: eight inches. Zone 5.

2. Deadnettle (*Lamium maculatum*): Silver leaves edged with green light up any shady spot. Purple, pink or white flowers are a bonus all summer. Height: eight to 10 inches. Zone 2.

3. Sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*): This vigorous spreader has starry white flowers in spring over pretty whorled leaves. Height: eight to 12 inches. Zone 4.

4. Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*): The big attraction of this native plant is its velvety green, heart-shaped leaves; the flowers are odd little purple-brown cups usually hidden by the foliage. Height: six to 12 inches. Zone 3.

5. Wood phlox (*Phlox divaricata*): Fragrant, five-petalled blue, purple or white flowers are held high on 12- to 18-inch stems in spring over mats of glossy dark green foliage. Height: six to 12 inches. Zone 4.

interior design at work outside

Gregory Grammer, an interior decorator, applied several of the design principles used while renovating the inside of his home to his garden.

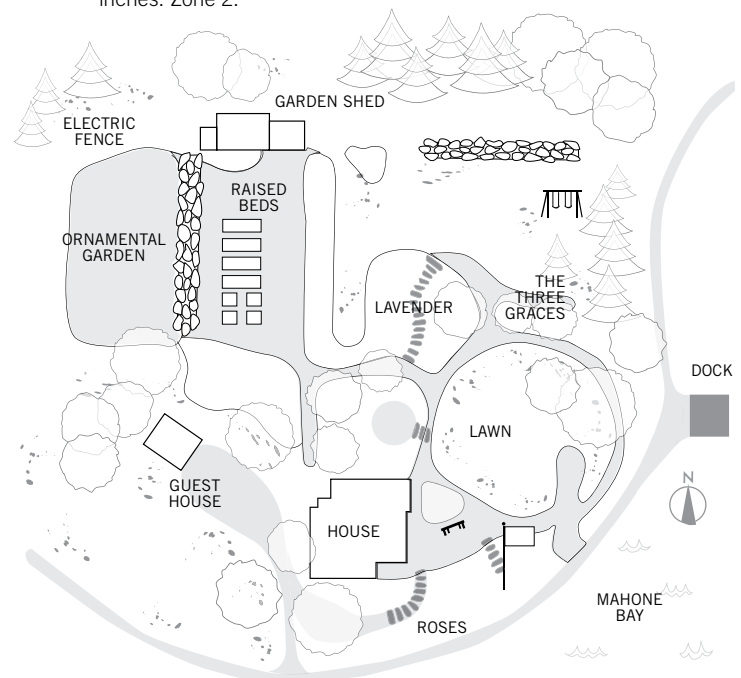
Decide on a focal point.

"In a room, you decide on the point of view. Is it the architecture or a piece of art, for instance? It's the same in a garden," says Grammer. "To frame a view, I would use columns of trees underplanted with a carpet of ivy and stone, upon which I'd place garden furniture."

Try to establish flow.

The eye should sweep over the scene, says Grammer, adding that he likes to layer tone on tone. "I might play down the furniture to play up the artwork. Similarly, there are sweeps of tones to draw you into the landscape."

Keep it simple. "I like rooms that are simplified, so whatever you're wearing won't clash with what's in the room. You'll always look good." It's the same in Grammer's garden, where colours are restricted to a limited palette that includes the pinky-purples of cranesbills and the pink of Oriental poppies along with dashes of yellow in a tapestry of greens.



was rich and dark because it was full of animal droppings,” he says, adding that he harvests it yearly to create new beds.

The Grammers began work on the house and garden the minute they moved in. Indoors, they removed walls, renovated two bathrooms and turned the attic into usable space. Grammer applied the same design principles in the garden as he did inside his home (see “Interior Design at Work Outside,” page 49) and set about creating a landscape with elements of the home’s heritage. To that end, he bought roses that were bred in the second half of the 19th century, such as ‘Blanc Double de Coubert’ which thrives in the windswept climate. Another favourite rose is the ruffled pink ‘Thérèse Bugnet’, an equally tough Canadian-bred beauty introduced in 1950.

There was plenty of trial and error in the beginning. Two maples planted at the front of the house next to 50-year-old ashes were out of proportion and had trouble growing in the wind. These were moved to a more sheltered spot at the back of the house where they have since grown to 50 feet. Six birches planted at the side of the house also had to be moved because of brutalizing winds.

And then there were the ravenous deer. The Grammers planted a large vegetable patch (30 by 40 feet) with the help of their friend Donna Finck. “Donna started us with a few easy things: sugar snap peas and tomatoes,” Grammer recalls. “Within a few weeks, the deer had eaten everything.”

At first, Grammer surrounded the vegetable patch with a wrought-iron fence, but the deer jumped over it. Then he ran a nylon mesh interlaced with electrified copper wire along the property and over the wrought-iron fence, which proved to be an effective barrier.

“A friend gave me *Martha Stewart’s Gardening* (Clarkson Potter, 1991), which is about her garden at Turkey Hill in Westport, Conn.,” says Grammer. “We have a similar climate and it gave me ideas and principles to apply in my garden.” Eventually, the vegetable garden became an ornamental garden. Other gardening sources suggested they plant mugo pines (*Pinus mugo*) on the slope to protect a few ‘Hansa’ roses from the wind. “We built meandering paths

to mitigate the angles of the house’s architecture,” Grammer says. The paths also help unify the large garden.

Boulders and foundation stones were used to terrace the 20-foot slope between the house and the road that runs along the water’s edge. To create sculptural interest, Grammer made an arrangement of three stones that had been part of the foundation of the 18th-century house, calling them “The Three Graces.” Other garden accents beloved by the Grammer children (Gage, 15, and Chase, 12) are three little bronze sculptures of Winnie-the-Pooh, Christopher Robin and Piglet. “I have always loved E.H. Shepard’s illustrations in the Winnie-the-Pooh books,” says Grammer. “We put the statues at the beginning of a path and the children say ‘hello’ to them as they walk by.”

The Grammers like to use lots of groundcover under their trees (see “Easy Groundcovers,” page 49). After planting Japanese spurge (*Pachysandra terminalis*) and watching the deer devour it, they tried periwinkle (*Vinca minor*), which took seven years to establish due to bouts of drought and being uprooted by the deer, and Baltic ivy (*Hedera helix* var. *baltica*) that thrives.

Grammer also uses colour sparingly and limits the variety of plants. “My principle was to simplify and repeat. [This technique] pulls huge areas together visually.” In the spring, orange and pink Oriental poppies (*Papaver orientale*) bloom simultaneously with bloody cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*) and lady’s mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*). Grammer says the idea for lady’s mantle came from another influential book, *Brother Cadfael’s Herb Garden: An Illustrated Companion to Medieval Plants and Their Uses* by Robin Whiteman and Rob Talbot (Bulfinch Press, 1997), based on the Ellis Peters novels about a medieval monk. “I have a fascination for monastery gardens,” he confesses.

The Grammers’ experience taught them to work with nature by adapting to the vagaries of weather and the appetites of hungry deer. “I think we were creating garden theatre to go with the romantic concept of our house,” says Grammer. “And we got a romantic estate look.” □