

A walk through Laura Cunningham's
gardens is a horticultural journey
that reveals a variety of serene spaces
filled with personality
and surprising touches

ROOM *to* GROW

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The gravel and boxwood parterre evolves into a succulent tapestry.

Near right and below: Covering ground in the succulent tapestry are sedum and echeveria



HORTICULTURALLY SPEAKING, LAURA CUNNINGHAM wears her heart on her sleeve. When it comes to gardening, her inclination is to spill the beans — literally: Legumes greet you upon arrival at the Cunningham compound and the neatly geometric raised beds within the front door courtyard overflow in a cornucopia of broccoli, peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, and squash mingling with scented geraniums, basil, pineapple sage and miscellaneous other herbs. The bounty is truly a full market basket of produce. Plus, it's all proudly stationed where friends, deliverymen, and the paperboy can't help but notice.

On the surface, the veggies sprouting and spilling over the deftly designed walled courtyard provide the makings for some scrumptious meals. But dig



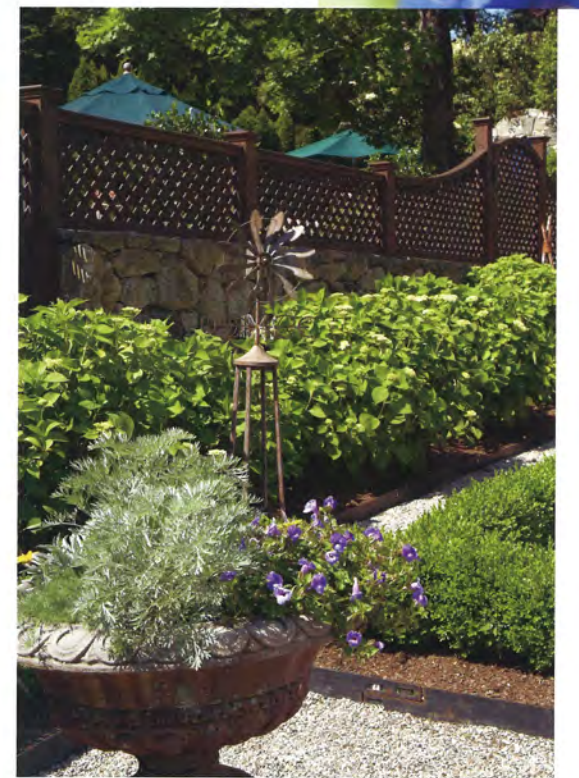
Sunflowers and roses line the walkway along the far fence.

deeper, and the entryway garden bespeaks a much broader mission statement.

The front garden is just one in a variety of distinct venues that dwell around several interconnected living spaces. Originally, the structures were part of a sixty-acre estate with a main house on Round Hill Road. To be specific, the house was a polo pony stable and the barn was a working hay barn. By 1960, the house and its barn were subdivided into a four-acre plot and converted into living spaces using the contemporary treatment that prevailed at the time. When the Cunninghams came onto the scene fifteen years ago to purchase two acres and the buildings, they took a totally different tack, restoring the barn to its original

post-and-beam past. Plus, they renovated a chilly greenhouse connector into a warm, snug dining room with a rustic motif while holding firm to the original footprint. Then they started planting.

After doing an architectural renovation that didn't echo anyone else's style, Laura figured that she'd also take the high road horticulturally. In a brazen rebellion against cookie-cutter cultivation, she set out to follow the beat of her own drummer in the landscape. Her first act of defiance was to eliminate a major chunk of asphalt to remedy the totally tarmac salutation that spread in front of the house. Having banished a goodly portion of blacktop, she proceeded to install greenery — with an emphasis on off-the-beaten-path shrubs that set the pace



Artemisia is a constant in urns, accenting the boxwood parterre.

Top right: Some gardeners find delphinium difficult, but not Laura.

Left: Laura Cunningham

Far left: Behind the dining room is a bird-attracting blue garden with yellow and white for contrast.



In summer, the Cunninghams dine outside in the sunken garden.
 Right: Verbena 'Lanai Purple Mosaic'

for what would be going on behind the house. From there, she went for a compelling labyrinth of different moods unfolding behind the house. In fact, the moment the bulldozers rumbled away, the Cunninghams dialed up John and Kim Conte of Fairfield House & Garden to do a little landscape architecture. The Contes installed the complex hardscape necessary for a series of different garden rooms, then Laura swooped in with the plants. And that's the way they've worked the collaboration ever since.

At first, it might have been beginner's luck, or a maverick's mania because Laura was the consummate novice when she began planting. A confessed horticultural "know nothing," the



Turquoise ceramic pots pick up on the cool blue of the pool.