



A window in the home's entry frames a view of stones, a Japanese maple and creeping thyme in the courtyard garden.

# Stones and Plants

A Japanese garden evolves to fit its northern home.

Story by Mary Lahr Schier  
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Most of us know a Japanese garden when we see one: the mix of stones, water and carefully pruned plants; the asymmetrical balance that is so different from western formal gardens; the views and viewing points; the paths that encourage you to walk toward what you see and what is hidden. These elements and more create the sense of unhurried calm a Japanese garden evokes. The gardener also needs to take an unhurried approach. Nurturing a Japanese garden requires patience and a lot of work.





A meandering dry stream and paisley-shaped beds of pachysandra give the east gardens texture and interest.

“I think people don’t understand the craftsmanship involved in a Japanese garden,” says Linda Hoeschler, “or the maintenance.” Placing rocks, pruning trees, selecting plants and getting the design just right has been a two-decade process for Linda and her husband, Jack, as well as garden designers, installers and gardeners working with the Hoeschlers as they have transformed their 2-acre lot into a garden of repose and inspiration. The process has been rewarding but slow, which Linda considers a good thing.

### Beginnings: A Garden for the House

The Hoeschlers moved into their Ralph Rapson-designed, mid-century modern house more than 40 years ago. With children and two busy careers keeping them occupied, the garden naturally took a backseat. Later, they began to add Japanese elements to the house to soften its hard modern lines. A shoji screen and Japanese art reflected Linda’s appreciation for Asian culture (she studied it in



Crabapple trees add color in spring.

college) and gave the house a cozier feel. Eventually, the couple decided to add a Japanese garden, too, starting with a do-it-yourself effort in their front courtyard. “Everybody loved it,” says Linda, “but we knew it wasn’t right because the stones weren’t big enough.”

In the mid-1990s, the Hoeschlers met noted garden designer David Slawson, who was working on the Garden of Quiet Listening at Carleton College in Northfield. On his first visit to the site, Slaw-

son looked out over the 1-acre west side yard, empty of everything but grass, and said, “I see a lake.” Soon, Slawson and Linda were at a rock quarry in Shakopee selecting more than 37 tons of stones for the original installation, marking the chosen stones with pink notecards and silver tape. Fortunately, Linda notes, rocks were free then and they only had to pay for hauling the massive stones.

Placing the stones, however, required a skilled crew, bulldozers and lots of dig-



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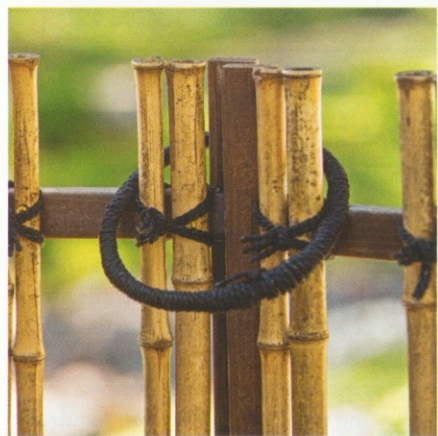


Stone and wood walkways guide garden visitors.

ging. This investment allowed Slawson to place them in the traditional Japanese manner, with about two-thirds of the stone buried in the ground. The stones seem to burst from the earth. “He’s very bold,” says Linda.

After the initial installation of the stone-surrounded lake of buffalo grass with a peninsula and island evoked nearby, more gardens and features were added, then re-designed, then supplemented

over the years. Personnel changed, too. In 2010, designer John Powell, a protégé of Slawson, assumed oversight of the garden. He visits several times a year to consult with the Hoeschlers and the skilled workers who help the Hoeschlers maintain the garden. Powell has increased the pruning needed as the landscape matures. “He respects what David Slawson has done and continues to improve on it,” says Linda.



Natural materials dominate in the garden.



Pachysandra is a “turkey-proof” plant for Linda.

### Practical Plants and Garden Rooms

Throughout the many design changes, the Hoeschlers were adamant about the plants. They needed to be endemic to our northern climate and environment, and to be able to withstand rigorous pruning and unpredictable weather. For the brief but glorious shoulder seasons of spring and fall, Linda chose plants with flash: pink-blossomed crabapples and redbuds that create a cloud of color for a few weeks in May, and stunning maples and winged euonymous that are all gold and red in October. “The seasons here aren’t that long,” says Linda, “except for winter.” For that interminable season, hemlocks, false cypress, pines and boxwoods provide abundant artful places for snow to rest.

The garden is an extension of the house, with garden rooms that can be admired from inside or wandered through outside. Secluded by a redwood fence, the revised courtyard garden near the front door includes two basalt boulders that form an *ama-ochi* or “place where raindrops fall.” In a spring rainstorm, the dips in the stones fill with water and glisten black. Two dwarf hemlocks frame the boulders while other stones form a pattern in the courtyard, softened by thyme, moss and ferns. A river of stone leads to the east yard. In one corner, a well-pruned Japanese maple stands guard.

The east side garden may have been the most troublesome of all the spaces. It was installed quickly at the end of the landscape season in 1997 and the river of stone that runs down a hill through a meadow toward the back of the house looked artificial at first. After years of adjustments, the stream was reconfigured completely in 2016 to give it a more meandering path. Boulders were added and rearranged to evoke nature and give water places to pool or fall. Intriguing paisley-shaped beds were planted with pachysandra and moss. Linda loves pachysandra as a groundcover for aesthetic and practical reasons. It’s evergreen, tough and attractive; it’s also one of the best plants for “turkey-proofing the yard.” The wild birds—prevalent in the wild areas near the garden—can’t stand





The east garden blends into the woods beyond.

“I think people don’t understand the craftsmanship involved in a Japanese garden.”



Columnar maples bring a flash of color in fall.

the feel of pachysandra beneath their feet. The moss, some of it harvested from the couple’s lake property, is Jack’s specialty. He places and weeds it, leading Linda to dub him the “moss-wrangler.”

The rear garden faces south and features a pleasant deck flanked by columnar maples for viewing the garden and the wild area beyond it. It also is the garden most open to the lower level of the house. (Since most Japanese homes are one-level, creating a garden that worked from both levels of the house was one of the many challenges the Hoeschlers faced.) The shrub *Stephanandra* is native to Japan and creates a cloud-effect for those who walk the aggregate steppingstones from the house through the garden. As they have matured, the maples create a cathedral effect over this quiet area.

The largest and most impressive space lies to the west of the house. The original lake that Slawson envisioned is an expanse of buffalo grass edged by rocks and a row of sculptural hawthorn trees. Mown just once a year, the grass is blue-green and flops like waves. A few years ago, Linda replaced the original grass, which had been weed-prone, with ‘Legacy’ buffalo grass, a USDA Zone 2 hardy cultivar from the University of Nebraska. It greens up slightly later than the plants around it, which allows easy weeding early in the season. In the distance, beyond the lake, an ironstone rock evokes a cliff and island over Lake Superior and a wall of fir trees ensures privacy.



A *tome-ishi* signals garden visitors to stop.



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“This is a microclimate,” Linda says of the urban location. “So it’s always been zone 5, but it’s tricky.”



Traditionally, visitors waited to be invited to the tea house in a *machiai*. Here it offers a quiet place to view the garden.

North of the lake is a long, dry stream that wanders from a *machiai* shelter near a gate to this part of the garden. *Machiai* structures are traditionally the place visitors wait before being invited to a tea ceremony. The stucco and tenon structure with a cedar roof and slate floor includes a bench that provides a sheltered place from which to view the garden. Large rectangular stones create a path along the dry stream and a bridge for crossing it. In 2009, the Hoeschlers converted their former garage to a

library, with large windows overlooking the stream and a magnificent sculptural redbud. The ground-level plants in this section are all about texture: yews, pachysandra, wooly thyme, short sedums and vincas. They grow around the large and small stones and bits of moss grow into the stone areas.

As perfect as the garden looks now, it has had its troubles. Plants that did not perform well, such as Colorado blue spruce and ‘Sea Spray’ junipers, were removed. A fence around the yard

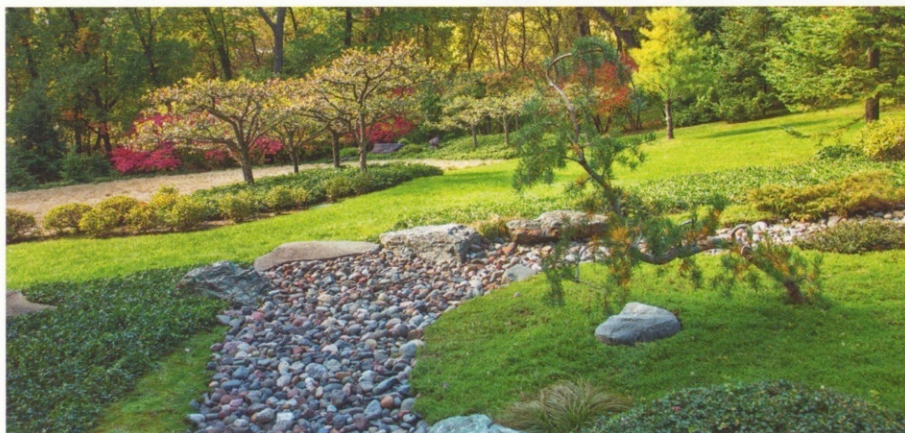
keeps voracious deer out. Thanks to the presence of coyotes nearby, the resident rabbit population, which has attacked the Hoeschlers’ dwarf lilacs, is down. And, what looks good and performs well in the garden is often discovered through trial and error. “This is a microclimate,” Linda says of the urban location. “So it’s always been zone 5, but it’s tricky.

“You have to see what works and not be afraid to move it or throw it out,” she says. It also helps to focus on the essence of Japanese style rather than excess ornamentation, such as tiny Buddhas and lanterns. “Do it with rocks and plants,” she says.

And, the process continues. In 2018, the Hoeschlers asked outdoor lighting designer Janet Lennox to devise discrete lighting for the south and west gardens. Thrilled with the results, they plan to add more lighting to the remaining gardens this year. The lighting turns the gardens into “a moonlit dream,” Linda says.

Whether in daytime or night, the garden is simple and elegant, quintessentially Japanese yet at home in Minnesota. **ng**

Mary Lahr Schier is the editor of *Northern Gardener*.



The sea of grass (tan area, upper left) is flanked by sculptural hawthorn trees.