

GROWING GARDENS

in the *Mountains*

By Gusti Laidlaw

Ramblings of a Mountain Gardener

Flexibility is key. Sounds like an introduction to yoga—not a gardening article. However, rigid plants and rigid plans are quickly humbled in the mountains. By observing and emulating nature, we can enjoy creating gardens here and not be totally frustrated by climate and ever-changing weather patterns.



Photo by Courtney Price

Gardens like these pictured above and right are examples of how you can give your garden texture and color.



Photo by Gusti Laidlaw

Lime and compost are the essential soil additives here.

Gardens are an art form, the elements of which are in constant flux. Plants grow, and are inevitably crushed here. Weather is predictable: it will be fickle. Hence, water needs, soil considerations, zone and time of bloom are all variables which all gardeners must consider, but mountain gardeners know that any of those elements could change from year to year, or from one location to another on your property.

My advice is to try a favorite plant and observe results, but be willing to change or alter. For instance, perhaps you might want to have a rhododendron. I personally like the little leafed impeditum, as they look so much like the rhodys at high mountain lakes. PJMs have a mid sized leaf, in varying colors, early purple bloom, and do well under snow cover. The Catawbiense Album is a large leafed 5' plant with spectacular white blooms. Try planting in eastern exposure, in a very protected location. Make sure there is plenty of light or few will bloom. Snow cover is essential. If this does not work, try a smaller container. Often you can get a plant to adjust to this environment when they are younger, and the roots are more in proportion to top growth. I wanted a mass of rhodies in one garden and bought plugs of PJM. These small starts will grow contorted with snow loading, and have less breakage. They look good as a groundcover now, and should evolve into a wonderful shrub bed.

I think we generally water too much, which is surprising as water is so expensive in our town. In wanting to nurture, and often not being around to constantly monitor, we side on caution and give abundant water. Too much water is as detrimental as planting too deeply, or applying mulch too thickly. Rot ensues. Mugo pines quickly dieback, aspens topple over from the top weighing too much for their minimal root system. Shrubs and perennials exist, but do not flourish.

Obviously we need to water new gardens, particularly lawns, as roots have not had time to spread, but established landscapes need far less and we would have less nutrient runoff into the lake.

I like to include shrub roses in gardens. The fuchsia colored Hansa rugosa, the fragrant Thomas Lipton, found at Mt. Monkey business, and the tough as nails Therese Bugnet are a few of my favorites. Do not water or mulch excessively or you will have crownrot and fungus. You do not need to winter mulch roses here, as the snow does the job for you, and you will not be able to pull the mulch off early enough in the



spring to avoid rotting. These shrubs do not need to be pampered. They are flexible under snow, and just need spring pruning of dead stems. Even if you prune back to the ground as with the Nearly Wild rose, they bloom well in August.

Lime and compost are the essential soil additives here. Each year the evergreens drip acid onto the ground. Notice in conifer forests there is not an abundance of understory plants. The traditional woodland garden is under deciduous trees. Lime is needed to neutralize the soil pH. Most garden plants, perennials in particular, are unable to take up the soil nutrients unless the pH is within their preferred range. It is like sucking a milkshake through a straw that has collapsed-frustrating. Lilacs in particular



Photo by Gusti Laidlaw



Photo by Courtney Price

MAKING PLANS? LOOK AT OURS.



Compare a Lindal Cedar Home to any other custom home. You'll discover the beauty of Lindal's solid post and beam construction, premium materials, expansive interiors and exclusive lifetime structural warranty. You'll discover the difference a truly personalized home can make. Call or stop by today.



Lindal
CEDAR HOMES

Independently distributed by:

H&H Homes, LLC
14114 State Hwy. 55 McCall, ID 83638
888-634-1597
www.lindal.com/h&hhomes



Our commitment is to provide you with the best service, programs & pricing in the Pacific Northwest.

Aspen Country
Mortgage

Aspen Country Mortgage • 212 N. 3rd St, Suite A • McCall, ID 83638
208-634-2441 or 866-634-2241 • www.AspenCountryMortgage.com

Ask for Dan Riley or Jonathan Brewer

Log Home Financing Available • No Income Qualifier • Second Home Experts • Bare Ground Loans
Construction Loans • Jumbo Loans • Full Line Conventional Loans • Investment Property Specialists

appreciate a little lime each fall to aid in blooms. The best lilacs in our town are more in the valley than on the forested lake.

Compost is preferable in gardening to chemical fertilizers as it amends the soil texture as well as providing slow nutrients. I was not sold on compost until a few years ago when I repaired the vole damage on a huge lawn by raking, seeding and composting the specific spots instead of redoing the entire lawn. In September, the owner asked me what was going on. It looked as if an army of dogs had wizzed randomly on the lawn. The compost was still causing lush green spots months after the repair. In another case,

Many perennials
hardy to this area
grow well but
never get a chance to
bloom. Flowers bloom
here about four to six
weeks after the
Boise Valley.

we added a few yards of compost to a new home that had been backfilled with reject sand devoid of nutrients. We planted a thyme lawn, never expecting it to fill in within a year. From polka dots to masses. Now we use compost in all gardens, as the sole amendment in planting, and mix it with sand for topdressing lawns.

Generally, we are zone 4 here in McCall, but most homes have a microclimate that will allow us to grow zone 5 plants as well. Should you further wish to extend your options, you could even circle a favorite plant with heat tape as a friend does to grow the best tomatoes. More important than cold hardiness is the humidity requirement. Vermont's state tree is the Sugarmaple, zone 4. One reason

we have trouble growing this variety is because of our lack of chilling dampness. (Another reason might be soil pH). The Autumn Blaze fills most people's requirements for a maple here. It has strong red fall color, it is a robust shade tree with relatively quick growth, and it tolerates drought and varying soil conditions.

McCall has many "humidity" zones: the valley floor is far drier than the lake regions or the leeward side of West Mountain. Observe the native growth. We vary from sage to cedar. By planting on the eastern side of your home, or in an inside corner near sprinklers or water feature, you could grow rhodies, or yews, or even varieties of Japanese maple. Try a small one, so the top growth does not demand too much of the limited root system.

Many perennials hardy to this area grow well but never get a chance to bloom. Flowers bloom here about four to six weeks after the Boise Valley. I seldom use threadleaf coreopsis now, as they are not showy until mid August, when the party is almost over for summer cabins. My tigerlillies had incredible buds on them when they froze. If you love these later bloomers,

place them in a very sunny location, preferably near an asphalt driveway, to further push them. Choose early blooming varieties of such plants as Phlox, Boltonia and Cimicifuga.

To extend our season, we need to plant shrubs and perennials that give wonderful fall color and textures. This autumn was magnificent. The natives popped with red huckleberry, golden tamarack needles, yellow aspens and orange serviceberry. Gardeners added red aronia shrubs, ginalla and autumn blaze maples, viburnums and maroon spireas. Brilliant groundcovers included bloody geraniums, persicarias, spikey golden fronds of siberian iris, and peonies' blotchy orange leaves. The grasses, not turf, were frothy clouds of seed heads. Often gardens seem in their supreme glory after September, and who can cut them back.

Our flower season in McCall is relatively short. The wood anemones follow the daffodils in June, and the final curtain of rudbeckias and echinaceas swiftly closes the season about three months later. We need color and interesting texture even when our plants are not blooming, because fairly soon all will be white again.



Photo by Gusti Laidlaw

anderson architecture p.a.

A photograph of the interior of a rustic cabin. The room features a large stone fireplace with a wooden mantel, a wooden coffee table, and a large window. The walls are made of wood, and the ceiling has exposed wooden beams. The overall atmosphere is warm and cozy.

peter & kristin anderson, aia
120 n. 2nd ave. suite 201
ketchum id 83340
208.726.6054
www.andersonarc.com

sun valley
mccall
boise



A Tradition of Excellence
In Mountain Architecture
for more than 30 years.

Roger Wade

ARCHITECTS / PLANNERS
BOX 21 SUN VALLEY IDAHO 83353
208.726.4434 FAX 208.726.8413
www.wbjaarchitects.com

WRIGHT,
BRYANT
& JOHNSON
AIA



CHINKING • STUCCO

PLASTER
(INTERIOR & EXTERIOR)

CULTURED STONE



PO BOX 2265

McCALL, IDAHO

83638

FAX 208.634.7542

For Information Please call:

Joey Pietri 208.630.3870

or

Furel Dummar 208.469.9068

Some favorite performers are Blue Oat grass with chartreuse colored scotch moss. Add red dianthus. Bergenia with New Hampshire wild geranium and iris pseudocarpus. Ligularias and hostas. Orange flowered rock rose with Walker's low catmint. Terracotta yarrow with ice blue Eryngium. Or just the native Kinnickinnick by a lichened boulder. Our season is short, but perennials love the cool nights and give us plenty of options.

To further extend your garden in the snow season, go to the woods, with a Christmas tree permit, and cut various varieties and heights of conifers. Add some red twig dogwood prunings, or yellow willow. Arrange these in your planter or even in your garden and they will keep their color all winter. When the Hotel McCall was first remodeled, we had an empty planter facing the highway. We filled this with firs and spruce of all sizes, and then covered them with white lights. It was a beautiful display all winter.

My final comment is to "Go take a hike!" See what the pro, Mother Nature, has created. These landscapes too have evolved through trial and error, with constantly changing elements. Whether you prefer mountain meadows or dwarfed alpine rockeries, observing the beauty of our environment untouched by man will surely improve your small patch at home. And besides, this is why we are in McCall, isn't it?

Spring

Anemone Sylvestris; Earliest white blossoms, spreads easily.

Aquilegia (columbine) Hansell

Harebell; deep blue lavender blooms.

Prairefire Crabapple; Nice branching, hot pink flower, reddish bark.

Prunus Padus, European birdcherry; Early fragrant white blooms, tough.

Rhododendron Impeditum; Dwarf, little leaf, resembles high altitude "labrador tea"

Spiraea Grefsheim; early white blooms, billowy soft blue gray leaves.

Summer

Shrubby Penstemon; Grows in cliffs around the lake, purple blooms.

Threadleaf Penstemon; Red or yellow blooms, like the native scarlet gilia.

Thymes and Mosses; Can't get enough of them, lots of blooming times.

Geranium Magnificum and New Hampshire; I love all the geraniums.

Crusader Hawthorne; Nice branching, glossy green leaf, thornless, fall color.

Blue Oat Grass; Steely blue, goes well with warm colors.

Autumn

Swedish Aspen; Columnar with more orange fall color.

Autumn Blaze Maple; Great red fall color.

Aronia Melanocarpa; Black chokeberry, 4-6 foot shrub, spring flower, autumn red.

Siberian Iris; Lots of color in bloom, great fans of gold spikes in fall.

Persicaria Dimity; Groundcover to hide rocks, cascading flames in fall.

Autumn Brilliance Serviceberry; Open habit, white spring flower, red fall color.

Winter

Russian Golden Willow; Yellow branches.

Mountain Ash; Persistent red fruit attract Evening Grosbeaks.

Cardinal Red Twig Dogwood; Intense red stems.

Sub Alpine Fir; Soft Needles, wonderful smell, columnar alpine look.

Western Red Birch; Open habit red cherry like bark.

Bristlecone Pine; Contorted with character.

MH



Hotel McCall Courtyard
McCall, Idaho
634-4730





Fine Italian Ceramics,
Luxury Linens,
Professional Quality Tools and Supplies,
Wine Accessories,
Elegant and Everyday Glassware, *and So Much More...*



Bella will surprise and delight—especially those accustomed to large franchise kitchen stores.
The difference is in personal customer service.



Visit bellakitchen.com and receive a discount coupon

Gift Wrap • Complete Kitchen Packages • Shipping • Bridal Registry • Gift Certificates

Shutters an affordable alternative.


With today's innovations, having shutters in your home is now more affordable than ever! Shutters may also increase the value of your home up to 10%. Let our 23 years of experience help you find the right design application to fit your style and need. Don't delay!


Call now for your free design consultation!
208-853-2673

We Also Offer:

- Draperies, Sheers, & Panels
- Cornice Boards & Valances
- Bedding & Pillows

Visit our website for inspiration!
www.interiorsourcesllc.com





INTERIOR
SOURCES LLC