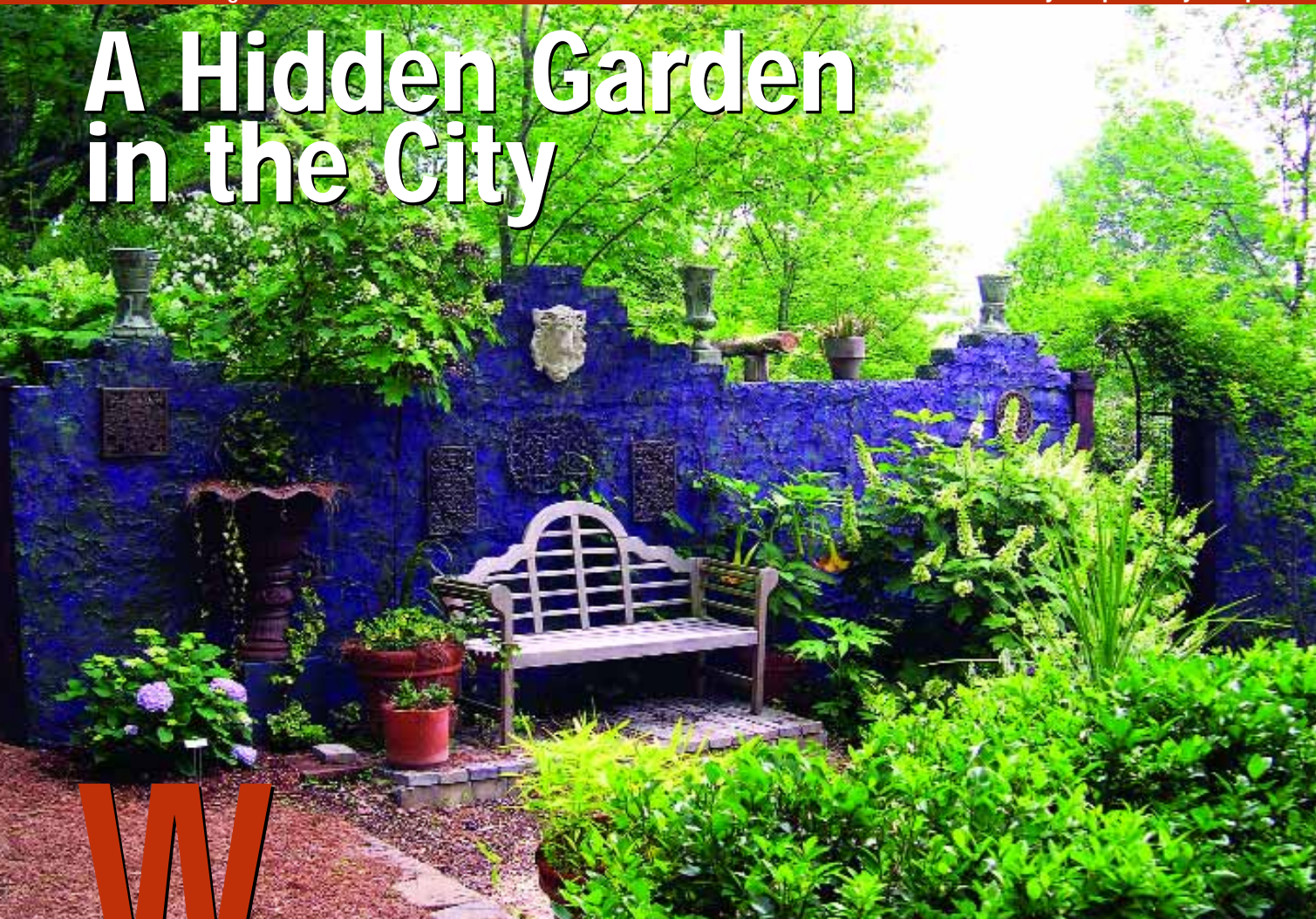


# A Hidden Garden in the City



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hen we first moved into our home in the fall of 1992, there was no garden to speak of. Four mature dogwood trees, a massive pecan tree and a few forlorn fruit trees were all that dotted a large expanse of lawn. The only hint of a previous garden was a formal circular hedge that enclosed empty raised beds and a broken bird bath in the center.

We were eager gardeners then, having created a postage-stamp size garden at our former apartment. Our new property consisted of three-quarters of an acre; an empty canvas – we were in hog heaven. I envisioned masses of roses and profuse borders bursting with flowers and shrubs. The first order of business was reducing the lawn area that took hours to mow. We immediately started planning the borders and planting areas that would take the place of grass. Another desire was privacy. Our house was exposed on all sides to neighbors.





▲ Oakleaf hydrangea 'Snowflake' is a native of Alabama. *Hydrangea serreta* 'Bluebird' can be seen in the background.

**Right Top:** 'Climbing American Beauty' grows on the archway. *Buddleia alternifolia* is on the right.

**Right Middle:** Rhododendron and oakleaf hydrangea flourish underneath a dogwood tree.

**Right Bottom:** 'Tausendschon' drapes a fence. The shrub roses beneath are 'Gartendirektor Otto Linne'.

**Opposite Page Top:** Hydrangeas, angel's trumpet and potted plants complement the garden wall, which was built in 2006. A secret garden is behind it.

**Opposite Page Bottom:** Oakleaf and mophead hydrangea and hosta grow beneath a large pecan tree.

That was fifteen years ago and, more or less, our dream garden has been realized. There is very little grass to mow and with fences, hedges and masses of plants, the house is almost invisible from the street. Of course, serious gardeners know that gardening is a never-ending journey. It seems like a new plant obsession develops yearly, and creating and reworking areas is constant. Gardens change over time, sun gives way to shade if you plant a lot of trees as we did, and plants often mature much larger than you expected. And what does one do when you are passionate about plants and want one of everything?



## GARDENPROFILE

Our garden is an eclectic mix. Our first love is the antique roses. We started out with hybrid tea roses but soon knew that we didn't have the time and effort to coddle them. We eventually discovered the older roses, like the noisettes and hybrid musks, and got rid of all the hybrid teas that could not make it on their own. One of our first garden projects was constructing a 28-foot pergola to cover with climbers and ramblers. It is the focal point of the garden and is beautiful in May when the roses are blooming.

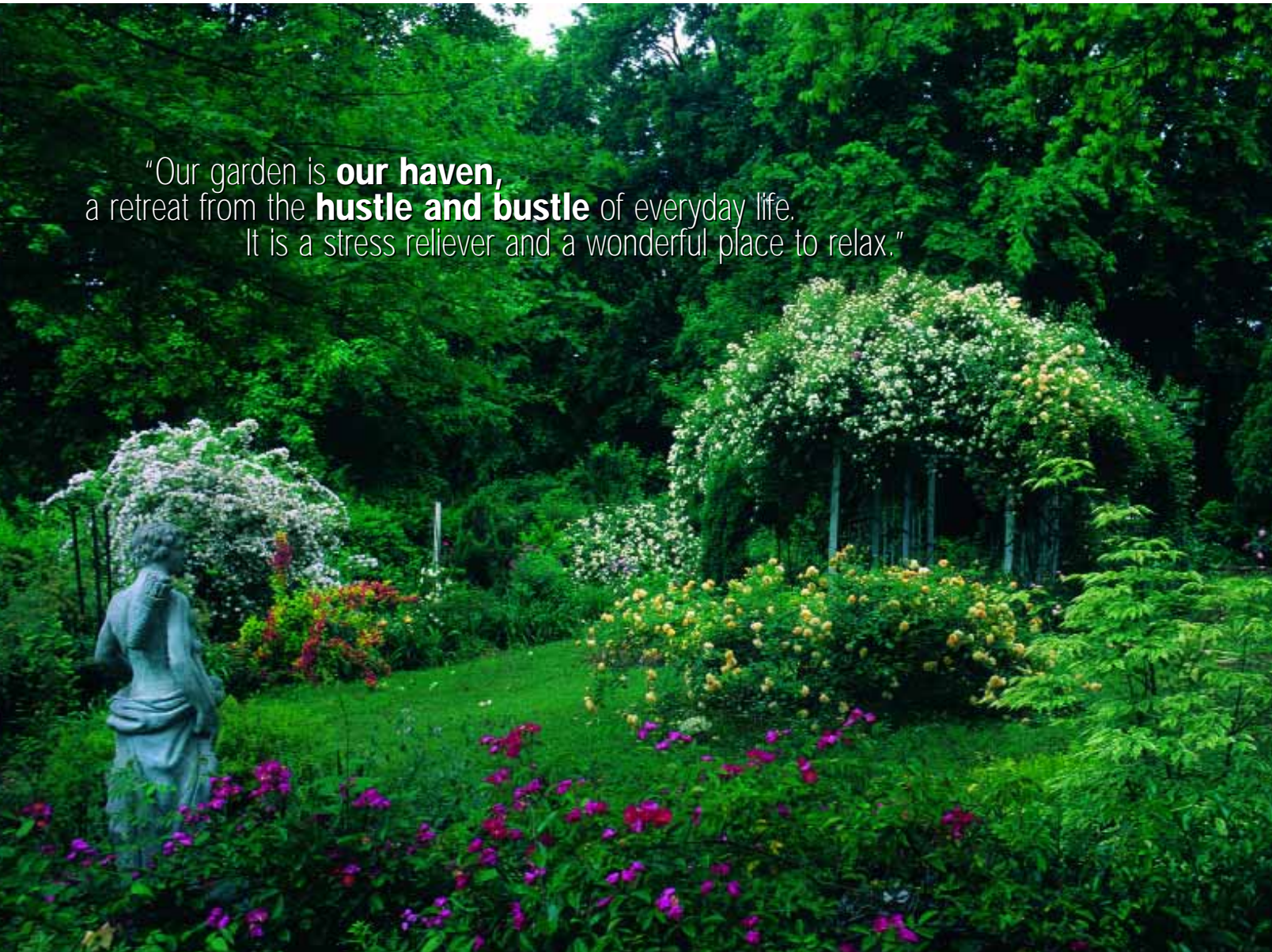
My partner Michael loves hydrangeas and over the years we have collected more than 50 varieties. Most of these reside under the large pecan tree but others are scattered throughout the garden. Oakleaf hydrangeas are outstanding for year-round interest and the lacecap and mophead hydrangeas provide major color impact for a long blooming period. They are among the easiest and most rewarding plants.



◀ 'Veilchenblau' adorns an archway that leads to the lower garden. The china rose 'Mutablis' grows at the left corner of the arch.

'Buff Beauty', a yellow blooming hybrid musk rose is a focal point in the lower garden. The pergola in the background is covered with roses, 'Rambling Rector', 'Reve D'Or' and 'New Dawn'. The pink rose in the foreground is 'Wind Chimes'. ▼

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We learned as we went along and eventually started creating “garden rooms” to isolate certain areas and specific types of plantings. A section alongside our driveway is devoted to shade loving and native shrubs. The largest area in the garden is the lower garden, which features the pergola and is surrounded by borders of perennials and shrubs. Last year we completed a project that we had discussed for years – a garden wall (made of concrete blocks and covered with stucco) with gates that lead into a “secret garden.” And the latest project is a small area on the north side of the house that will feature blue, yellow and orange flowers.

One of the most rewarding things about creating a garden is the wildlife that it attracts. Even though we live in town, we get a lot of furry visitors from the Tennessee River area that is about a half mile down the street. Over the years we have observed raccoons, foxes, turtles, snakes, possums and others in our garden. We have a large bird population and every year there seems to be a new arrival on the scene. One morning we were amazed to see a red-tail hawk sitting on the back of the garden bench outside the kitchen window!

Our garden is our haven, a retreat from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. It is a stress reliever and a wonderful place to relax – although there is not too much time for that! Gardening is also an endless learning experience – there are always new plants to discover and new projects to conquer. Now if only we had more space ... 🐦

*Phillip Oliver is a librarian at the University of North Alabama. For more photos of his garden, visit his website at <http://home.hiwaay.net/~oliver>.*

**Top:** A garden bench is flanked by roses ‘Moonlight’ and ‘Robin Hood’.

**Middle:** A corner of the lower garden is anchored by the hybrid musk rose ‘Moonlight’.

**Bottom:** A perennial border showcasing roses is formed. Roses (left to right) are ‘Lyric’, ‘Fantin-Latour’, ‘Gartendirektor Otto Linne’ and ‘Lavender Pink Parfait’.

