



Above In the tiny area just inside her back gate, Nancy has planted 40 or so containers with annuals, along with some perennials, such as cordyline and fuchsia.

Right The yellow box, sited among lush planting, is not a bird house but a poetry box, one of many around Portland, in which residents leave poems for others to enjoy.



A dense mix of purple-flowering plants, including the Asiatic *Lilium* 'Black Jewel', *Centaurea cyanus* 'Black Garnet' and sweet peas, fill the borders around Nancy Goldman's house in Portland, Oregon.

Nancy Goldman has always been serious about her gardening. “I got involved with the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon early on,” she says. “I’ve been on the board, was president for four years... I’m knee deep in gardening, maybe waist high now.” But not too serious. This is Portland, Oregon, after all, where the eccentric and the whacky are more or less mainstream, and where ‘Keep Portland Weird’ is almost the city motto.

Perhaps Nancy’s, and indeed Portland’s, secret is to combine creativity with good organisation and clear forward planning. “I went to Portland Nursery with a wagon, and I bought perennials A through M,” remembers Nancy. “And then later went back and bought them from N through Z.” That’s serious plant buying, however, plants are only part of the story. For much of the 30 or so years Nancy has worked on her modest-sized suburban garden, it was most notable for crazy sculptural displays of found objects, many discovered in skips, from what Nancy calls “dumpster diving”. The planting now takes centre stage, although there are still plenty of reminders of her older style. Look and you will find a washbasin, two seats, a supermarket trolley, and a typewriter, all planted up.

The planting here is incredibly skilful. Anyone walking past Nancy’s house gets a taster, as the front garden is densely planted, ▷

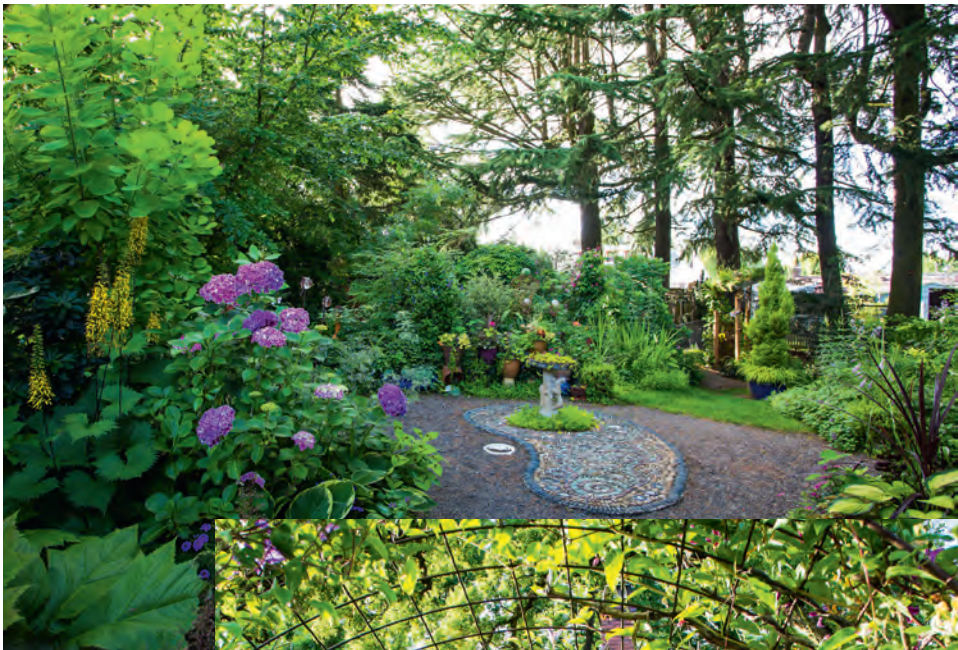
In brief

What Plant-focused, suburban garden that incorporates displays of found objects.
Where Portland, Oregon, USA.
Size Just over 830 square metres.
Climate Mediterranean and temperate with dry summers and cool, wet winters.
Soil Clay, with lots of rocks, ameliorated with crushed basalt and compost.
Hardiness rating USDA 8-9.

Mix and match

Take a closer look and you’ll find Nancy Goldman’s exuberant garden to be a skilfully worked mingling of plants and ephemera

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Above left Nancy's friend Jeff Bale created the pebble mosaic around the birdbath. Nancy gathered most of the rocks herself and added some marbles that light up in the sun.

Above A pretty shoe acts as an unusual container.

Left A shady arbour covers the path to Nancy's front door. The grass edging the path is *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon' – one of Nancy's favourite edging plants for shady areas.

Right Nancy with her dog Jacques, a papillon. The fridge-magnet Latin phrase translates as 'my garden kicks ass'.

▷ as is the area known as the 'hell strip' (the strip of earth between the road and pavement). This strip also includes a couple of mosaics, courtesy of Nancy's friend Jeff Bale a local landscape architect, famous for his pebble creations.

What is immediately obvious in the front garden, and which is carried on in the back, is the density of Nancy's planting. This is absolutely not because plants are crammed in, as a closer look reveals how well everything is layered. "I try to get the right place for everything, and I don't want things looking forced," explains Nancy. "The garden is systematic, even though it looks blowsy, or outrageous or crazy or whatever." It is not just the physical arrangement of the plants, but the level of care too: "I'm always out there doing something maintenance wise," she says.

There is almost no lawn. Nancy's friend Lucy Hardiman, a well-known local writer and garden designer advised against one early on, but now there's little room for one anyway among so many plants. "When you have a habit of buying too many plants, you have to figure out where you are going to put them," says Nancy. That doesn't mean there is no careful editing of the plants that make it into this plantaholic's garden. "I have a strict colour code," she explains, "I don't do red and I don't do blue, well maybe the

odd accent; I have blue containers, but not blue plants. I do chartreuse, through green, orange, yellow, and I love, love, love pink." It is, however, the green that is dominant; endless shades of green, and a huge, but subtle range of foliage shapes and textures. Nancy sees her garden as part of a wider aesthetic. "The way you dress and the way your house looks, is the way your garden looks too," she declares.

There has been plenty of hard work, Nancy started with an unforgiving clay and added 'quarter ten' – a local crushed basalt – and compost to some part of the garden every year. The rewards seem to be good growth, although with the hot, dry summers typical of Portland there still needs to be some summer irrigation. Above all, however, this is a garden that represents half a lifetime of learning about plants and putting them together, and that is exactly what makes it such a success. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Nancy's garden is not generally open to the public, but she does open on selected days for members of the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon. See hardyplantsociety.org for details.



8 favourite plants from Nancy's garden

1 *Colocasia esculenta* 'Mojito'
A type of a common tropical vegetable (taro), but with variegated leaves – up to 60cm long – that have a different pattern on each leaf. It requires warm summer nights to succeed, and in the UK should really be grown indoors. Certainly needs to be brought inside over winter 90cm. USDA 7b-10b†.

2 *Clematis* 'Princess Diana'
An herbaceous species, so starts up again every year from ground level. Long summer flowering. 2.5-4m. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 4a-11.

3 *Salvia* 'Amistad'
A very long-flowering, herbaceous salvia that originates from a nursery in Buenos Aires in Argentina. Sun and fertile soil needed. 1.2m. RHS H4, USDA 8a-11.

4 *Ligustrum sinense* 'Sunshine'
An evergreen privet with golden-variegated leaves. Can be kept clipped if needed. Best in full sun, and tolerant of a wide range of conditions. 2m. RHS H6, USDA 7a-9b.

5 *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gold Bar'
Horizontal gold bands on fine leaves make an impact from spring onwards. Will produce flower/seedheads at the end of warm summers. Non-seeding. 1.5m. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

6 *Lysimachia congestiflora* 'Persian Chocolate'
A very dark-leaved foliage plant, useful for edging and containers. Relatively strongly spreading. Yellow flowers in summer. 15cm. RHS H6, USDA 6a-9b.

7 *Clematis* 'Étoile Violette'
A vigorous species but with light growth, making it suitable for scrambling over shrubs; flowers late summer. Hard annual pruning needed. 3m. RHS H7, USDA 6a-9b.

8 *Lilium* 'Lionheart'
This hybrid Asiatic lily produces long-lasting flowers in midsummer, and has a reputation for increasing well over time. Likes sun or very light shade in moist, well-drained soil. 90cm. RHS H7, USDA 3a-8b.



eclectic garden