



(above) The design of this narrow side garden makes it appear larger than it is.
 (right) Jan and Jack Baker, creative gardeners.



An Inventive Garden in the Heart of Town

JACK AND JAN BAKER
 South Madison Street

Jack and Jan Baker are hands-on visionaries who have created a series of “garden rooms” flanking their cottage bungalow in downtown Bloomington. A plaque notes that the cottage was originally constructed as the Goodman House in 1924. When Jack and Jan bought it in 1978, they started the garden from scratch. Jan is a popular teacher of culinary classes, so it is not surprising that many of the items grown in their eclectic garden end up as ingredients and garnishes for meals.

A horticultural tour around the house begins with two spring-blooming trees, lush plantings, and welcoming flower boxes near the front door. There are a series of garden rooms—spaces enclosed with clipped boxwood hedges—along the left side of the house as one enters the garden, and a long brick pathway that leads the eye to distant vistas, making the narrow lot appear to be much larger than it is.

The repetition of enclosures allows many different flowers (as well as the occasional rhubarb and sorrel) to be included without a feeling of disorganization.

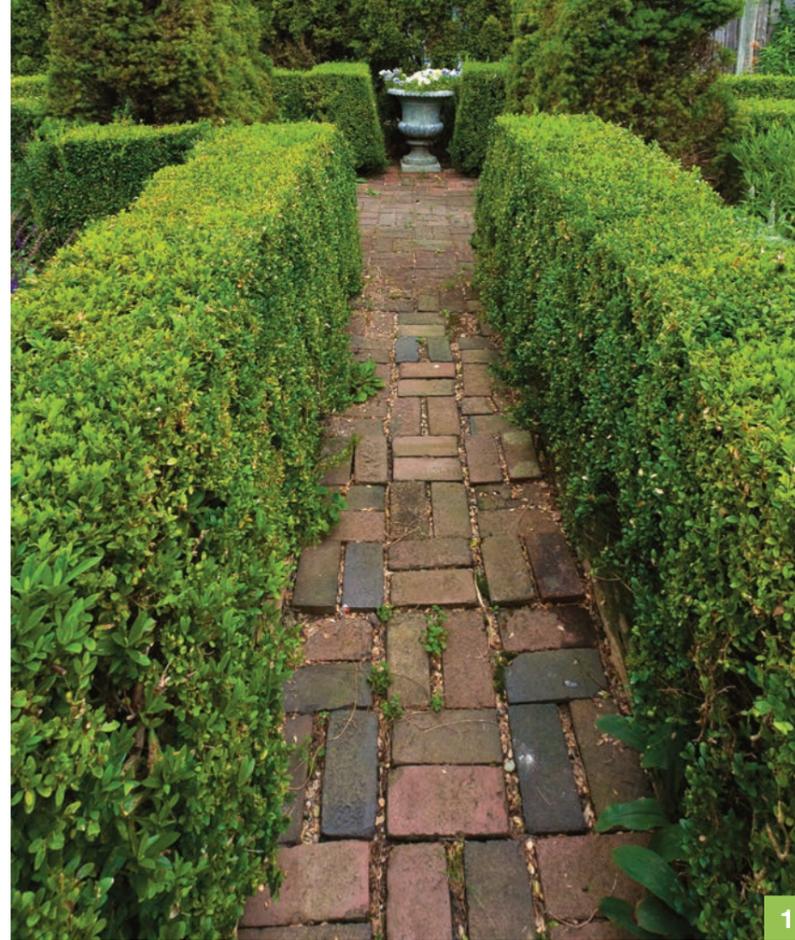
Jack built an undulating privacy fence separating the side garden from the neighbors. He periodically created openings in the fence where container plants are displayed and can be viewed from both sides. Jack says he tried “to create the same atmosphere that was created in 15th- and 16th-century parterres where showy plants were contained by formal hedges.”

Across the back of the lot, there is a weathered structure that creates additional privacy; it is used as a studio/shop and features a dovecote (pigeon home) and bat house. Trellises on its sunny side hold purple Jackmanii clematis and Joseph’s Coat climbing rose. Along the shady side is a bed of ferns, hardy geraniums, ligularia, and other shade-loving perennials. The side of the garden that abuts the alley has a high sheltering hedge; between it and the house is an in-ground checkerboard of herb gardens in wooden boxes

set in crushed red brick. The lush green-and-gray herbs stand out against this background and also contrast with the adjacent flowering rose bushes and an antique gray limestone horse trough.

Behind the house are several private seating areas where the couple and their guests enjoy alfresco dining in the warm months. Inspired by the work of Gertrude Jekyll, an influential British garden designer of the early 1900s, Jack built shelves on the back of the house for terra cotta containers planted with annuals. Scattered throughout sunny areas of the garden are large pots containing tomatoes, lettuce, and a variety of other salad greens.

Despite space constraints, these urban gardeners and committed foodies have used clever design strategies to meld edibles with a large assortment of ornamentals.



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1. Clipped boxwood hedges lead the eye toward a flower-filled urn.
2. Jan creates colorful homegrown salads.
3. Herbs populate a checkerboard garden of wooden boxes and crushed red brick.
4. The Bakers enjoy entertaining guests in this alfresco dining area.
5. The antique horse trough echoes the area’s native limestone.
6. In one of many welcoming “garden rooms,” a bench invites a contemplative moment.