

Burnham Woods Nursery May Be Gone but Dan & Lisa Burnham Garden On



In midsummer, the garden is full of different textures of green interspersed with clumps of vibrant color. The plantings change and evolve throughout the seasons.

(left) Career horticulturalists Dan and Lisa Burnham frequently travel and gather plants, making their garden a showcase for many unusual specimens.



Dan and Lisa Burnham, both career horticulturalists, operated Burnham Woods Nursery, a valued and popular destination for local gardeners, from 1989 to 2006. They educated their patrons by creating demonstration gardens that modeled how plants could be sited in home gardens. To this day, plants purchased at Burnham Woods are being admired in local gardens.

Although they no longer have a nursery, the Burnhams still garden on part of their 150

acres in northeast Monroe County, and their personal space resembles an extensive botanical garden, showcasing unusual specimens and combinations of plants. They still grow many perennials but have expanded their repertoire to include many more conifers and Japanese maples.

"We are on the top of a ridge, and it used to be just an open expanse once the perennials died down in the winter," Lisa says. "Now it is less exposed as we have trees and shrubs with interesting shapes, berries,

and bark, and conifers that provide the garden backbone, so it is vibrant until Christmas, and the shapes and textures are interesting all winter."

Dan notes they look for the following qualities when choosing trees: the shape of the outline, seasonal changes in foliage color, bark interest, flowers, and berries. "The conifers don't like to be crowded," he says, "so as they grow larger we'll remove some of the perennials and the landscape will become an even more subtle array of scenes with a wide variety of nuances as the light changes across the seasons."

Behind the house, the landscaped vista extends for almost a quarter of a mile, the lawn merging into a field and the field into the tree line. The woods are the far-away backdrop, with many native trees providing spring-flower and fall-foliage color. The beds that are far from the house rely on the boldest plantings like the *Rudbeckia maxima*, a tall gangly sunflower that sways as birds perch on it to get the seeds.

Lisa explains that the garden is designed to include sequences of bloom and fragrance in addition to form, shape, and texture. For example, a sequence of bloom in one bed starts with *Forsythia*, followed by *Spiraea*, peonies, *Hydrangea*, ornamental grasses, varie-



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gated *Caryopteris* 'Snow Fairy,' the iridescent pink Japanese anemone 'Bressingham Glow,' and deciduous holly with red berries in the fall. One detects many fragrances in this garden, including those of *Abelia*, lilac, *Clethra*, *Phlox*, and *Hosta*.

There's an auditory dimension to the garden, too, "such as the chorus of spring peepers at the pond and the cooing of the mourning doves," Lisa says. "We also enjoy the diversity of the critters: turkey babies, turtles, a family of hawks."

This expertly designed garden has continued to evolve in many dimensions. As part of the nursery, it already had a rich tapestry of established plants, and the owners used their knowledge, skills, and creativity to expand the plant repertoire. They also



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1. This photo illustrates part of the expansive mowed lawns in the foreground of plantings of shrubs and perennials. The scale of the plantings, interspersed with berms and beds, creates the illusion of a large botanical garden.

2. The garden is designed so there are views from the porch, which encircles three sides of the house.

3. Pink *Dianthus* with gray foliage, purple *Scabiosa* in the center, and tall gray *Lychnis* and cone-flower in the back create a bed with visual and textural interest.

4. A rustic bench sits on a path with a bark mulch surface. A white *Hydrangea* can be seen behind the slats.

5. The Burnhams have a wide selection of conifers and Japanese maples. Even in winter, the conifers provide accents because of the chartreuse and blue-gray foliage, which contrasts with the varying shades of green.



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had the courage to delete and fine-tune. They are now painting on a much larger canvas, considering both long-range vistas and close-in plantings from a variety of perspectives, and harmonizing many different variables across the seasons.