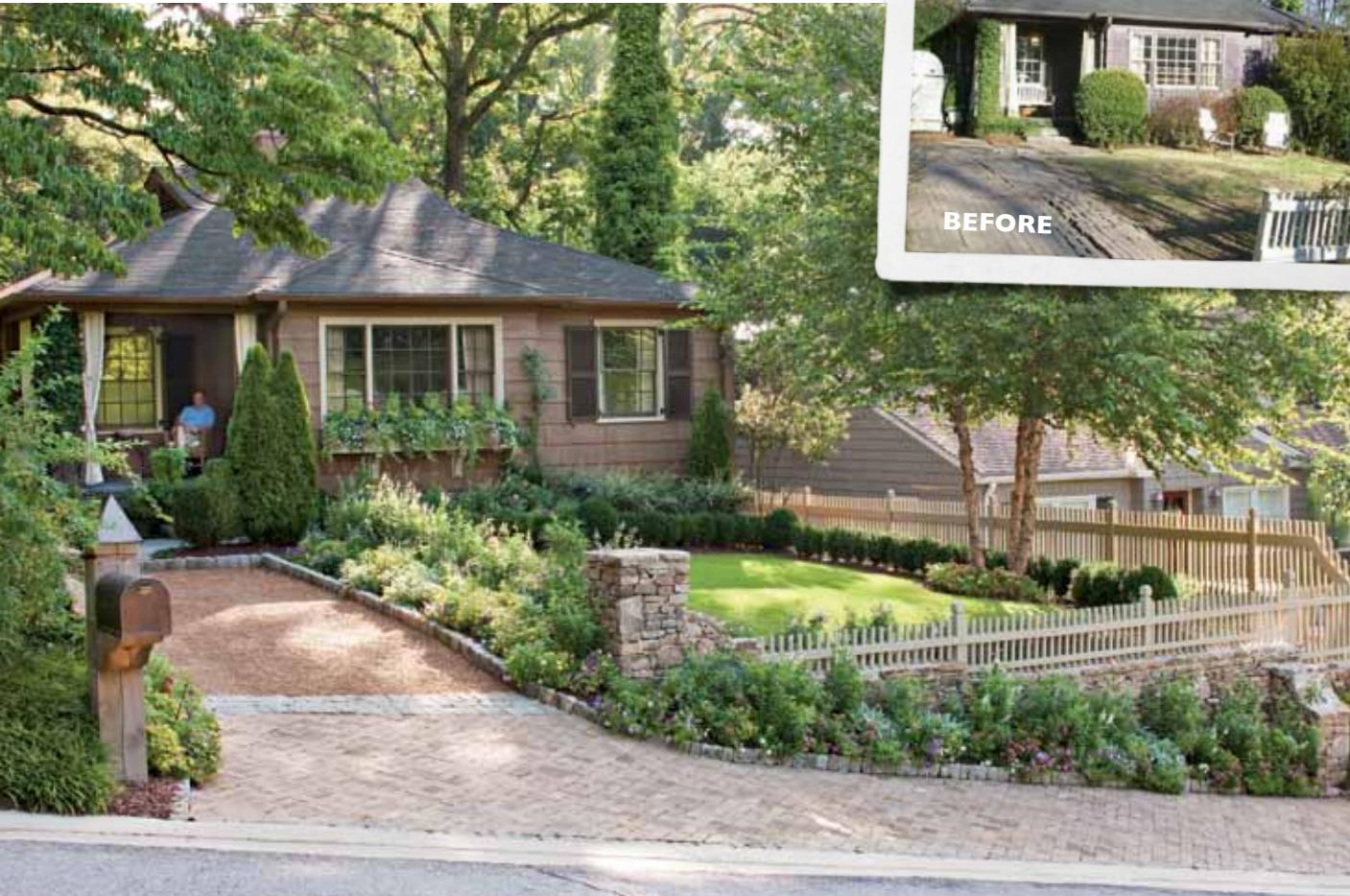


Wake Up the Front Yard

Lively flowers, extra parking, and a new entry turned this once-dreary cottage into an eye-catching gem



Talk about a house that didn't want to be seen—this little cottage in Mountain Brook, Alabama, looked like it was part of the witness-protection program. Hidden by shrubs, devoid of color, and vexed by a scraggy lawn, it shunned the spotlight like a spy.

Today, it's a starlet commanding attention. Cheerful seasonal flowers greet you out front. A new fence and stone wall clearly define the yard and separate it from the street. The redone parking, front walk, and steps direct you to the cozy front porch. Designed by

Birmingham garden designer Troy Rhone and installed by Integrity Landscapes, all of the garden's spaces are in perfect scale to show off the house. Almost anyone could learn a lesson or two from this success story.

Lesson number one—first impressions do matter. With room in the driveway for only one car, the previous owners had added an asphalt pull-off by the street for additional parking. Though functional, it wasn't exactly a joy to behold. Troy replaced it with a larger pull-off made from bricks recycled from the former drive and set in a herringbone pattern. Flowers complete the transformation.

What They Did

- Added flowerbeds of mixed annuals and perennials to create a charming cottage look
- Widened the parking areas for homeowners and guests using permeable pea gravel and unmortared recycled bricks
- Replaced the uninviting concrete retaining wall out front with a lower stone wall topped by a picket fence

BEFORE: COURTESY TROY RHONE



WE LOVE THIS!
Purple and pink petunias, red periwinkle, silver lamb's ears, and pink, white, and blue salvias draw butterflies and hummingbirds.



◀ WELCOME GUESTS WITH GREEN

'Emerald' arborvitae and sculpted boxwoods frame the front walk with lush foliage and direct you to the porch. The greenery complements and softens the hardscape elements. "Because the garden is so small," notes Troy, "we wanted the homeowners to feel like they were surrounded by plants the minute they pulled into their parking space." An edging of gray Belgian cobblestone contrasts nicely with the color and texture of reddish brown pea gravel.



▲ WALK THIS WAY

Troy kept the side yard's original wooden gates but replaced the paving with bluestone pavers rimmed by dark green mondo grass. The striking pattern sets this path apart from the solid walk leading to the front door. The row of 'Emerald' arborvitae gives privacy from the neighbors and is a much better option for screening than too-tall, disease-prone Leyland cypresses.



▲ STEP RIGHT UP

The old front steps were too narrow and restricted movement to the porch. Troy replaced them with bluestone slabs that are thick enough for secure footing and wide enough to provide easy access. "It used to be that you could only go straight down the steps," says Troy. "Now when you walk down the steps, you can turn in either direction." The steps also have room for containers.



▲ MAINTAIN YOUR FOCUS

Surrounded by a skirt of dwarf mondo grass, this ornate planter filled with an assortment of herbs provides a striking focal point in the middle of the diverging walks. Troy placed the planter here to draw attention away from the fact that the front corner of the house isn't centered on the parking space. Now when a car pulls in to park, the house looks like it's centered.

▲ ADD A SENSE OF ENCLOSURE

Troy removed the old concrete retaining wall by the street because it was too tall and looked like it had been designed to keep people out. He replaced it with a short picket fence set atop a handsome new stacked-stone wall. Together they provide needed separation from the street without blocking views. They also form two walls of a garden room and add the perception of greater safety to the sloping lot out front. "I didn't want people feeling like they were about to fall into the street," explains Troy.



TAKE IT FROM TROY

These easy updates will boost the appeal of any home and garden.

1.

Add a window box.
"A very nice window box can completely transform a house's curb appeal. Don't buy a cheap one. Have one made to fit your house."

2.

Remember the hardscape.
"A garden of all plants looks too soft. Adding elements of hardscape, such as paving or a picket fence, to provide structure makes a big difference."

3.

Increase your living space.
"Create garden rooms where the lawn is the floor, shrubs are the walls, and trees are the ceiling."

4.

Define the lines.
"Make sure bed lines between planting beds and the grass are really well defined." Edging beds with bricks or stones gives an elegant appearance. Cheap black plastic doesn't.

MIX & MATCH

Troy shares his favorite plants for vibrant, dependable color.

1.

Trailing Lantana

This annual comes in many different colors, loves heat, tolerates drought, and is a magnet for butterflies and hummingbirds.

2.

Blue Phlox

Growing about a foot high, this perennial wildflower (*Phlox divaricata*) blooms in spring. 'Louisiana Purple' is a great choice.

3.

Melampodium

This mounding annual is smothered in bright yellow, star-shaped flowers all summer. 'Million Gold' grows only 12 inches tall.

4.

Trailing Petunia

This annual comes in lots of different colors and blooms nonstop. Try the Wave, Supertunia, and Surfinia series.

5.

'Coral Nymph' Salvia

A prolifically blooming annual, it has spikes of pink-and-white flowers all summer. It's ideal for beginning gardeners.

6.

Mealycup Sage

Hardy from the Lower South on down, it grows 18 to 24 inches tall with showy flowers all summer. 

