



# Ruth Young's Garden for All Seasons

By Gloria Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis & Neil Young

Ruth Young has a one-and-one-third acre garden near the Niagara Escarpment between Acton and Georgetown. Although she and her husband Neil own and operate Young's Pharmacy & Homecare in Georgetown, she does all the garden work herself, without professional help. "I garden whenever I can," Ruth says, "whenever I'm not at work." She adds that Neil sometimes mows the lawns, and they hired a tree-cutting company to take out a large tree that fell down. Otherwise, this is very much Ruth's garden.



The view from Ruth and Neil Young's house is onto their natural pond. The heron sculpture is meant just to add beauty, not to protect the goldfish. "I love seeing a heron land at the pond," says Ruth. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.



The Youngs' log house has a wide front verandah to enjoy the hosta bed in front and the natural pond beyond. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

**T**he garden has been significantly transformed from what it was when the Youngs moved here 14 years ago. Ruth remembers that there were some boxwoods at the front door, a couple of peonies, huge yews at the side of the house, and junipers and weigela decorating the pool area. "And a huge black walnut in front of the house," she adds.

Ruth is fortunate in that the

soil, while rocky, is predominantly good loam, so she didn't have to do much. "I still add compost, manure and lots of mulch on top," she says. Yet at first, Ruth wasn't keen on moving to the country away from her house and garden in Toronto. Neil got her to change her mind when she saw this house and property.

"All that open space to create a garden," she remembers. "And the fact that I could look out

the window and not see another brick wall."

### **Structure and Colour**

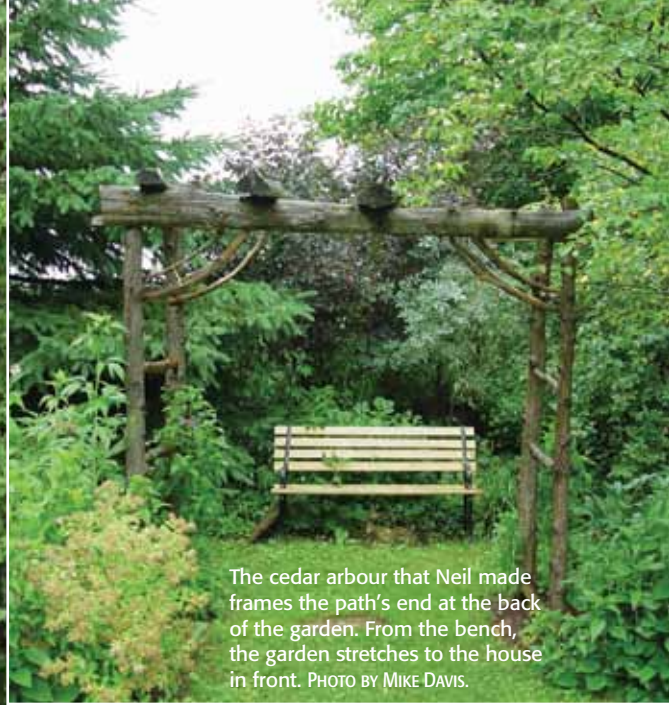
The garden wraps around the house and extends to the back fence. Grass lawns provide open space and wide paths through arbours. Flowering plants climb the posts and shrubs add height. Wooden obelisks and garden sculpture punctuate the beds, adding drama when plants are



A side view of the front of the house shows the troublesome slope now converted to an easier-to-maintain hosta bed. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.



Ruth's garden uses obelisks and fencing to frame tall plants like delphiniums, foxgloves, roses and grasses. PHOTO BY NEIL YOUNG.



Mist rises from the large garden at the side of the house. Plantings and structures invite visitors to explore. PHOTO BY NEIL YOUNG.

The cedar arbour that Neil made frames the path's end at the back of the garden. From the bench, the garden stretches to the house in front. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.



### Ideas from Ruth's Garden

- ◆ Repeat structures to create a theme and unify separate garden beds.
- ◆ Consider contrasting and complementary colours when choosing plants.
- ◆ Change a slope that's difficult to mow into a garden bed.
- ◆ Provide seating throughout so people can linger within the garden.
- ◆ Protect yourself against mosquitoes, try to build resistance to bites, but get tough!

tall, and beauty when snow is on the ground.

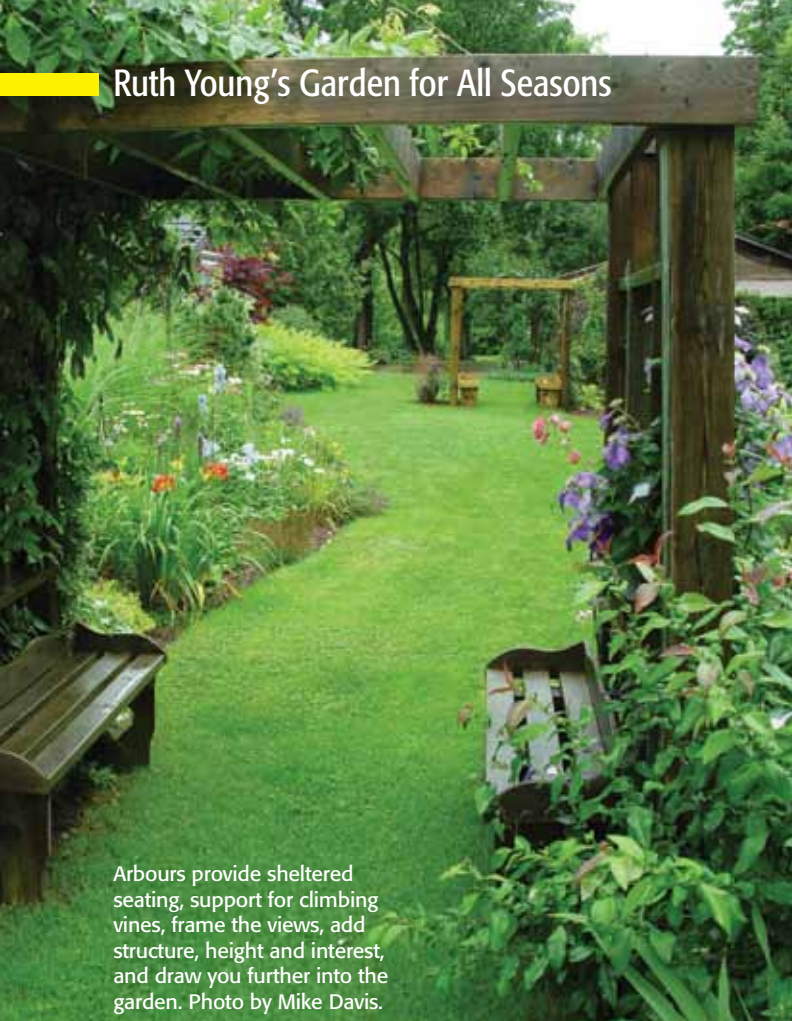
Ruth is conscious of repeating structure and colour throughout the large space to create a theme and unity among the separate beds. She is also interested in contrasting and complementary colours among plants. She points out a red Japanese maple planted behind a light green bush with red stems, with the name Tiger Eyes Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac. Even the hen and chicks below reveal green and red stems.

Ruth has been gardening for about 30 years, ever since she was in her first house. The garden was the size of a "postage stamp," she says. She learned to garden from watching her mother, and she says she has been influenced by some great gardening speakers and designers like Stephanie Morris and Toronto gardener Marion Jarvie.

"But really," she explains, "after joining the horticultural society in Acton, I got to listen to great speakers, exchange ideas and information with experienced gardeners. I also dug into all sorts of gardening journals and magazines."

It was her mother who solved a problem in the garden. She suggested that Ruth plant the steep slope close to the front of the

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Arbours provide sheltered seating, support for climbing vines, frame the views, add structure, height and interest, and draw you further into the garden. Photo by Mike Davis.



Ruth's garden is award-winning. Proof is displayed modestly yet proudly at the side of the house near a shy clematis. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

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house in order to eliminate mowing the lawn there. Ruth used the idea and now that area is her hosta garden.

Neil has also left his creative mark. He made the lovely, rustic arbour at the back of the garden out of cedar from trees that had to be cut down.

### All-Season Interest

Ruth aims for year-round interest

through all seasons. This is apparent from lush evergreen plantings that screen the pool area from the family room's large window, which would give a beautiful vista when heavy with snow. For the other seasons, Ruth chooses a variety of perennials that will give continuous bloom.

"If you have to have them all, like I do," she confides, "then you will find you will have plants that bloom at all those times." Then she shares something surprising.



Peonies after a light rain. PHOTO BY NEIL YOUNG.

“But actually, I hate when there is too much bloom. It’s too much. I like the balance of green. I love green foliage. But I love burgundy foliage too. And charreuse. So foliage and the form of plant material is very important. Structure is too, in shrubs and trees. I have to have grasses as well, for summer, fall and winter interest. And of course hardscape, like arbours, obelisks, statues, urns and pots, is great because it never dies! We leave

the deck furniture out to collect snow. We have a metal and glass table that looks nice and we can measure how much snow we’ve had.”

Country gardeners, especially near wetlands, can have problems with blackflies and mosquitoes. With the large pond in the front yard, aren’t they plagued by insects?

“I think there are more mosquitoes in the cedars or the shrubs in the shade along the wooded

area,” counters Ruth. How does she deal with them?

“Tough it out. Build a resistance to those bites. Really, maybe wear long sleeves and get into those buggy areas before the bugs.”

Spring, especially May, is Ruth’s favourite season. “Everything comes to life after the long winter,” she says. “What a miracle! I just love those bulbs, spring blossoms, crabapple, daphnes,

peonies and lilacs.”

Everyone always points out that no garden is ever fixed and final, but is always changing. Ruth can live with that.

“I’m trying to think of the garden more like a three-dimensional painting. I hope someday I’ll achieve that balance of proportion, repetition, structure and form. I’m always hoping to make it better. I don’t think I’ll ever be finished but that’s gardening.” **EV**