

April Yard of the Month

SHARON LOCKETT
SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

Ten years ago, after re-sodding their lawn three times, Maggie and Dennis Hunt decided to trade in the front lawn for a landscape. They tilled out the grass and researched xeriscaping before embarking on this ambitious do-it-yourself project. Maggie used a garden hose to outline the edges of future planting beds before laying landscape fabric on bare ground to be covered with thick mulch. They hired a mason to build stone walkways leading from the front walk to each side of the house and placed simple stepping stones on top of the mulch to define paths through planting areas. Their historic house at 608 Burk Street (an extension of Maury) is Spring Lake Garden Club's April Yard of the Month. The property still complements a neighborhood of handsome older homes, but the yard is now high on plant variety and low on maintenance.

A deep wrap-around front porch bordered by cenizo shrubs overlooks the Hunts' front yard, elevated from the street by stone retaining walls, and the couple wanted to be able to enjoy their view while relaxing in this shady retreat. Maggie chose drought and deer-resistant plants and used one gallon containers to establish the new landscape: red salvias, blue-flowered rosemary, multi-hued lantana and other hardy sun-loving specimens. Volunteer four o'clocks joined the mix, naturalizing on the right side of the front yard against a green wooden fence. Maggie planted an orange trumpet vine next to the pergola leading to a spacious side yard where a volunteer shrimp plant decided to settle. The shrimp plant blossoms contrast strikingly with purple-leaved tradescantia (wandering Jew). Garden surprises are welcomed by the Hunts, adding to the variety of plants that thrive in the sun-drenched front yard.

On the left side of the house near the driveway and carport is a stone paved sitting area that includes a rose which was part of the landscape when the Hunts arrived—as well as lantanas just recovering from winter pruning. A white plumbago is reclaiming its spot against the latticework wall of the carport (added in the 1960s). On the far side of the driveway, a large, blooming loquat tree marks the intersection of driveway and street and anchors the end of a forsythia hedge known for its yellow blossoms. Maggie notes that neighborhood deer like to spend the night in a cozy spot behind the hedge. The salvias, rosemary, and yellow lantana lining the side of the drive nearer the house are already a magnet for pollinators, especially hummingbirds and bees.

Garden furnishings in the front yard include a black iron bench facing the vine-covered pergola on one side of the front walk, and a birdbath set in an urn planter on the other side. A large bowl on the ground beside the birdbath provides water for other wildlife. A young crape myrtle is caged to deter deer nibbling on lower shoots, but older specimens near the street grow without any protection. Once in full bloom, the pinkish crape myrtle blossoms contrast with the red-orange mulch used in the central front yard, and with the black mulch at curbside. Maggie cautions that the dark mulch can absorb heat in summer, so younger tender plants should not be planted in this ground cover.

Although the front yard has been their priority, Dennis and Maggie have also tackled drainage and plantings in the shady steep slope behind their house, situated between South Loop Street and Burk Street. To discourage parking (and soil compaction) outside the pavement on the upper street, the Hunts started some cactus plants at the edge of their property next to the street. Railroad ties help slow rainwater runoff downhill from the street and an original flagstone patio next to the house was rebuilt to better control water flow. Runoff from the street far above the house is directed around the patio or into seepage areas contained by rock walls. Maggie decided to try her own hand at constructing low retaining walls from rocks harvested while preparing planting areas, and learned to mortar them into place. She proudly points out her sturdy and attractive edgings for backyard plant groups, including a small herb garden in a sunny spot.

Whether making the most of a steep shady slope or an always sunny front yard, the Hunts' landscape efforts maximize the variety of environments on their property and match plants to sites where they can thrive and be enjoyed for their foliage and flowers.



The steps to front entrance of the Hunt home are flanked by crape myrtles and gray cenizo (Texas sage). PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY THE SPRING LAKE GARDEN CLUB



A tall garden urn that has been transformed into a birdbath is the central focus of the front yard xeriscape, with a large water bowl for other wildlife.



A view of a xeriscaped yard from the driveway, showing a vine-covered pergola and cenizo trimmed into a small tree.



A loquat tree in full bloom at end of the driveway certifies spring has arrived at the Hunt home.



The front door and side garden of the Hunt home, with a trumpet vine on the pergola in the foreground and a shady back slope in the background.