



The front of the house.



A basket of tillandsias.



Rob DeWolfe and Mike Haddad.

Beautiful Gardens

Rob DeWolfe
and Mike Haddad
Riverview, New Brunswick

Story by Shauna Dobbie,
photos by David Johnson

When you approach the home of Rob DeWolfe and Mike Haddad just outside of Moncton, be sure to use the driveway to get up to the front door; the stairs that lead down through the yard are overgrown with ornamental grasses leaning over the sides and sedums creeping up through the cracks, and there are a couple of garden accents and a pot crowding the way. It seems impossible that the whole front yard should be kept within the confines of... well, of the front yard. In addition to plants, there are trees including: two topiaried Amur maples, six Japanese maples, a corkscrew hazel, a ginkgo, a weeping pine and a weeping larch and two magnolias. And everything seems overjoyed to have found a place under the plant-loving hands of Rob and Mike.

In the distance you can make out the pale yellows of perennial foxglove. Reliable pollinator attractants such as rudbeckia, mullein, lilies, roses, iris, feverfew and many others share the space. Korean feather reed grass waves its frilly fronds at the slightest breeze, offering textural relief and movement to the medley of colour.

When you go around the back, you see more of the same. There is no grass to mow here. There are hundreds and hundreds of interesting plant specimens, many of them native to North America, covering every inch of the extensive garden space, their variety guaranteeing an ongoing parade of colour throughout the season.

Rob also has several plants in his garden with which many Canadian gardeners may be unfamiliar. One



View from the house, toward the street.

is *Kalmia latifolia* 'Kaleidoscope' or mountain laurel. It is a shiny-leaved shrub wearing bright red berries that open to cup-shaped cherry flowers with white highlights. The shrub is rounded, growing to 10 feet tall in some areas but likely to reach only 3 feet in New Brunswick. It is not for everyone, insisting on well drained but rich,

highly acid soil. It has an encouraging lifespan of 50 years or more and is not fussy when it comes to sun or shade. It is native to eastern North America extending to southern Quebec.

Then there is the young Japanese umbrella pine tree, *Sciadopitys*, with its airy needles and promise of a stunning future of structural change as it grows



Part of the back yard.



The umbrella pine.



An interesting azalea.



There is a pond, behind masses of grasses.

from an attractive open shrub to a potential 60-foot tree with an umbrella shaped canopy. It is rated Zone 7, so it will surely maintain a smaller stature here. It does not tolerate temperature swings but if sheltered it might be okay for a few years.

Certain themes have developed in the garden as tastes progressed from one level to another.

Ferns are favoured. Beautiful *Athyrium filix-femina* 'Victoriae' or Victorian lady fern with its frilly, drooping leaves, is a Scottish import, hardy to Zone 4. It's pinnae (leaf parts) have an interesting criss-crossing habit forming the letter x. The drooping tassels at the end of the fronds have split tips. This a truly fascinating plant that was all the rage during the Victorian fern frenzy of the 1860s. This is just one of the many ferns in their collection. Another is the increasingly rare, broad leafed hart's tongue fern that is native to North America.

Sharp-edged and prickly plant pref-



Some prickly cactus and a tiny fairy house.



Mike is particularly fond of eryngium.



A few of their pots.



Close-up of zig-zag fern.

erences can be seen in the beautiful and intriguing eryngium, or sea holly, which Mike collects, his favourite being 'Miss Willmott's Ghost'. They like a sunny spot, but most are not fussy about soil, preferring slightly dry and a poor-to-not-too-rich medium. Once again, these plants favour at least Zone 4 and are so rewarding if you have the right microclimate. The sharp collection includes potted cactuses and prickly succulents. Even some of the poppies have sharp-edged leaves.

The back yard has it all: a sheltered pond surrounded by greenery including Japanese forest grass, epimedium and kautia, and even a swimming pool. But as always, the focus is on the plants. Once again, there is no room for lawns and grass mowing as Rob and Mike have found a better use for all that space: such beauties as a purple clematis, exotic-looking hellebores and tall, slender martagon lilies.

There is an embarrassment of trees and shrubs back here too, including a columnar apple, a deutzia, rododendrons and azalias and a 'Susan' magnolia, which blooms and reblooms into the summer. Hanging from some of the trees are orchids, and snakeroot, Oregon grape, tree and herbaceous peonies, mini *Miscanthus zebrinus* and more fill in spots on the ground. Mike has a 5-foot piece of driftwood growing staghorn ferns that he hangs.

Potted plants are all over the deck, filled with succulents, cacti and more. One features an *Anemone coronaria*, its brilliant blue repeated in some metal flowers that decorate the pond, where decorative dragonflies appear to flit among the greenery. A pedestal holds a clay turtle filled with succulents. A wire basket is filled with tillandsia, those epiphytes that don't require soil. One pot here has the summer remains of a poinsettia, one there has a few spikes of dracaena, the type you often see paired with zonal geraniums.

The pots with tropical or tender plants have been dragged inside for the winter now. Alocasias, colocasias, brugmansias, phoriums and others. Rob counts 112 of them on four levels, plus Mike's cacti. Some are dormant and some continue to grow, having the choice of an east or west window. The gardeners are spending a bit of time down south during the winter, surely gathering rest and ideas for another glorious year in the garden. 🌸