

Cultivate a Mindful Garden Retreat

In the Garden of Compassion, stones are stacked and balanced in a cairn as a sign of meditation. 'Stella de Oro' daylilies (*Hemerocallis* 'Stella de Oro'), a 'Fernspray Gold' Hinoki false cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Fernspray Gold') (top left), and a blooming arrowwood viburnum (*V. dentatum*) (top right), surround the sacred stones.

PHOTO: BEN TEASLER



Picture your own urban oasis designed to provide serenity and refuge from the hustle and bustle of modern life. I am grateful to come home to this beautiful and unique garden located in the middle of the city. Positioned on an unusual wedge-shaped corner lot, I saw this yard as a blank canvas for gardening magic when we purchased the home. After eight years of designing and installing 13 different garden rooms, all promoting mindfulness and reflection, The Contemplative Garden was born.

The first Contemplative Garden room greets visitors with an arbor, a garden gate and a white

picket fence. Upon entering the gate, guests immediately feel a sense of calm as they are drawn to the blooming perennials, which surround the Belgium-imported greenhouse. Soothing plant selections include a large Annabelle hydrangea (*H. arborescens* 'Annabelle'), tall, native Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), white spider flower cleome (*Cleome hassleriana*), white 'David' phlox (*P. paniculata* 'David') and white salvia (*Salvia* spp.). Planted around the base of the greenhouse is the colorful collaboration of 'Purple Sensation' allium (*A. aflatumense* 'Purple Sensation') and a majestic mixture of Asiatic lilies (*Lilium asiaticum*).

LEFT: Joyfully positioned amid the Tradescantia 'Sweet Kate' spiderwort is this stunning spring bloomer *Helleborus bellardiae* 'Pink Frost' from the Gold Collection. BELOW: The Garden of Compassion features several elements of contemplative garden design: The circular stone patio, the soothing water fountain, the inviting chairs and spiritually inspired statue. Japanese gold hakone grasses are strategically planted to compliment the potted standard Whipcord western red cedar trees.



Heartfelt Selections

Elements of design that are repeated throughout my contemplative garden rooms include the use of benches and chairs for resting; water features for soothing sounds; circular patios fashioned from sacred geometry; statues with an etheric feel; and a cohesive plant color palette that plays well off the white buildings that boast an Asian-inspired black and red trim.

I believe that choosing only items for your garden that speak to your heart is the basis for contemplative garden design. Whether it is a plant, hardscaping or a piece of furniture, I

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Color and Design for a Contemplative Garden

Cohesive and peaceful green foliage colors create a meditative space.

In sacred geometry, circular shapes provide soothing repetition.





ABOVE: The Belgium-imported greenhouse invites visitors to sit and contemplate among the red geraniums (*Pelargonium* spp.) and zebra grasses (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus'). The greenhouse is heated and used during the snowy mid-western winters. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** This peaceful path leads visitors from the Woodland Garden room to the Rain Garden. *Hosta plantaginea*, hellebore hybrids and cedar trees gracefully thrive in the shaded area.

advise my clients that if they do not love it, it should not be in their garden. Things that we do not love become irritants and energy drains, rather than promoting rejuvenation amid relaxation in the garden.

Along with the Greenhouse Garden room and the Edible Garden to the west, visitors next meander the path to find the Friends Garden. This garden room is our gathering space and entertaining area. It uses the color palette of greens and purples, which both compliment and sooth. From there, guests follow the path to find the Rain Garden and Woodland Garden rooms.

Flowers and Fragrance

The Rain Garden was designed with two stately river birch trees and native grasses to swale ground water away from the house. The shaded Woodland Garden supports more than 50 hellebore (*Helleborus* spp.) plants of different varieties, including the Hellebore Gold Collection (HGC) (*H. niger* 'Jacob'), which amazingly blooms in the cold snow of winter. This garden area is also home to dozens of the hybrid hellebores, known as the lenten rose, which was the 2005 Perennial Plant of the Year.



ABOVE: Visitors to the Medicinal and Herb Garden area find a Virginia creeper-covered (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) bench to rest on, a stone pagoda statue and pots of fennel (*Anethum graveolens*) to soothe the soul and the senses.



The complimentary color combination of green, purple and white provides soothing repetition for the senses in the Friends Garden. A large, white-flowering elderberry tree (*Sambucus* spp.) provides the backdrop for potted coleus (*Plectranthus scutellarioides*), chartreuse sweet potato vine (*Ipomoea batatas*) and the 'Partytime' (*Alternanthera* 'Partytime'), also known as joyweed.

Visitors to the Contemplative Garden continue their tour past the hundreds of lily-scented Hosta plantaginea, to the Garden of Compassion. There, sitting next to a statue of a Thai Buddha and a serene water fountain perched upon a glistening rock, they can admire the potted standard Whipcord western red cedar (*Thuja picata*) trees and the Japanese forest gold grasses (*Hakonechloa macra*), which issue an invitation to bask in the peacefulness of the garden. Renewal and reconnection are the treasures that visitors take away from spending time in a Contemplative Garden. ✨

Rita Perea is the founder of the International Contemplative Garden Association, which promotes "Sowing the Seeds of Mindfulness" through sacred garden design. Rita is a Master Gardener, a member of Garden Writers Association and Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden Friends Leadership Council.