

# Front Yard Alternatives: Lawn's Labour's Lost



By Sally Grover  
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## Donna Wildearth

When Donna Wildearth purchased her Eureka home in 2002, the front yard was landscaped with a lawn and 1950s-style foun-



Photo by Donna Wildearth

Above: Donna Wildearth's front yard before

Right: Same yard after using the "lasagna method" to remove the lawn.



Photo by Sallie Grover



Photo by Sallie Grover

Chimney flue tiles incorporated as planters

stration plantings of juniper, rhododendron, camellia and other perennials—not her ideal.

Like the lovers in Shakespeare's play, she would have to wait until the next year before she could pursue her love of planting; a true test to her commitment to get rid of the lawn using what is called "the lasagna method".

The lasagna method includes removing most of the established bushes and covering the entire front yard, including the existing lawn, with cardboard and rice

straw from October to March.

For the first winter, the yard looked pretty bleak. Her friends told her that she couldn't have a yard "like that" if she wanted to maintain her landscaping business.

But by spring, Donna was able to part the straw, cardboard and composted lawn and start planting.

She hadn't lost the soil, beneficial organisms or soil structure that would have been damaged by sod removal and she had gained multiple layers of composted, weed suppressing material.

In choosing plants, her goal was to have interest year-round, so Donna selected native and drought resistant plants, and personal favorites (for a



Photo by Sallie Grover

list visit [www.northcoastco-op.com](http://www.northcoastco-op.com)).

Drip irrigation was added in sections after areas of plants were established.

The yard does require maintenance. There are many different plants and

most require some cutting back at particular times of the year, while some reseed and volunteers need to be removed.

Donna believes that our gardens should be personally meaningful and encourages expression through the use of design, garden art and words.

She incorporates chimney flue tiles as planters, custom manufactured metal railing and her own art made from stone, mirror, ceramic and wood in the landscape of her yard.

## Tyler Vack and Thao Le Khac

Tyler Vack and Thao Le Khac, both teachers and artists, bought their home in Henderson Center in June 2007.

They didn't want to miss a single planting season and lost no time creating areas in their front yard for food production, privacy and play.

Their home was built in the 1950s in an area that had previously been rich, well-drained farmland. The sunny front yard had a lawn, foundation plantings and wind exposure.

The two removed the lawn with a rented sod-buster (no love lost here). To create an attractive screen from the street, Tyler and Thao built a berm across the front and sides of the yard by bringing in soil, planting mix and compost.

They used shredded redwood bark as a ground covering and decided not to use weed cloth in order to allow for a flexible planting scheme.

Tyler and Thao chose a variety of plants, from groundcovers to 6-8 foot tall non-deciduous bushes, and created a mixed privacy hedge of color, texture and movement (for a partial list of plants used in the berm, visit [www.northcoastco-op.com](http://www.northcoastco-op.com)).

Eventually they added pressure gauges, timers and soaker hoses to the existing water system to be able to water beds and berm separately.

Now that the plants in the berm are established, very little watering is needed.

The rest of the front yard was designed to include rectangular raised beds for vegetable crops and asymmetrical mounds for collections of bulbs, annuals and succulents.

Paths between the beds were created using weed cloth covered with pea gravel. The neutral, gray gravel warms in the sun and kids love to play in it.

Tyler's advice is to "go big". Put in lots of plants and pull out what doesn't work. Thao says, "We are two Capricorns with a

practical garden...at the same time we just go for it and things are constantly changing."

Tyler would rec-



Photo by Sallie Grover

ommend grading at this point to level areas where paths are planned.

To create a barrier between the neighbor's lawn and their yard, they dug a trench and put in plastic edging.

## Tom Clark

Tom Clark's yard was originally planted in potatoes back in the 1920s. The original owners planted a Deodar cedar, defined the area with cement walkways and planted a lawn. Camellia, rhododendron and hydrangea were also planted over the years.

Today, the cedar towers over the house and a collection of competing plants prevents grass from getting established. The area is under-planted with naturalized bulbs, meadow rue, campanula, baby tears and Irish moss. The yard has a natural look and a succession of blooms.

After the first rains, the bulb foliage grows and the yard begins to look lush.

Grape hyacinths are the first bulbs to show color in January and they dominate until the daffodils begin to emerge. Then come white freesias, sparaxis, ixia and tritonia. Alstroemeria follows with a groundcover campanula and the show ends with Gladiolus nanus. In the fall cyclamen come up and the camellia begins to bloom.

The yard does



Photo by Tyler Vack

Top: Tyler Vack & Thao Le Khac's front yard before  
Left: Same yard after planted with privacy berm



Photo by Sallie Grover

Vegetable garden and sitting area enclosed in privacy berm.

take maintenance. In late July, everything gets cut back. All the blooms, from the bulbs to the camellias, need to be removed once they fade in order to keep the garden looking fresh.

Competing groundcovers have to be kept in check and yellow oxalis is a constant invader. Trimming the cedar is expensive and allows more light in, which in turn allows some grass to take hold.

Tom does very little fertilizing but notes that there is a rain of caterpillars that fall from the cedar and get swept into the yard.

Find more in *The American Meadow Garden: Creating a Natural Alternative to the Traditional Lawn* by Greenlee at the Arcata Co-op.



Photo by Sallie Grover

Tom Clark's yard.

## Donna Wildearth's Plant List

### Front Yard

California Natives (and native cultivars):

*Achillea millefolium*—Common Yarrow  
*Aquilegia formosa*—Western Columbine  
*Aristolochia californica*—Western Dutchman's Pipe  
*Athyrium filix-femina*—Lady Fern  
*Baccharis pilularis* 'Twin Peaks'—Dwarf Coyote Brush  
*Corylus cornuta californica*—Western Hazelnut  
*Deschampsia cespitosa*—Pacific Hair Grass  
*Dicentra formosa*—Western Bleeding Heart  
*Eriogonum umbellatum*—Sulfur Flower  
*Eschscholzia californica*—California Poppy  
*Helenium bolanderi*—Sneezeweed  
*Heuchera micrantha* 'Palace Purple'—Alum Root  
*Iris douglasiana*—Pacific Coast Iris  
*Lilium pardalinum*—Leopard Lily  
*Mimulus aurantiacus*—Sticky Monkey Flower  
*Penstemon heterophyllus* 'Margarita Bop'—Penstemon  
*Penstemon rattanii*—Penstemon  
*Phacelia bolanderi*—Bolander's Phacelia  
*Physocarpus capitatus*—Western Ninebark  
*Platystemon californicus*—Cream Cups  
*Polystichum munitum*—Sword Fern  
*Rhododendron occidentale*—Western Azalea  
*Sidalcea oregana spicata*—Oregon Checker Mallow  
*Sisyrinchium bellum*—Blue-eyed Grass  
*Vaccinium ovatum*—Evergreen Huckleberry  
*Vancouveria hexandra*—Northern Inside-Out Flower

Landscaping Perennials:

*Abutilon hybrids*—Flowering Maple  
*Achillea* 'Terra Cotta'—Yarrow  
*Agastache aurantiaca* 'Apricot Sprite'—Hyssop  
*Alchemilla mollis*—Lady's Mantle  
*Anemanthele lessoniana*—Pheasant's Tail Grass  
(or *Stipa arundinacea*—New Zealand Wind Grass)  
*Artemisia* 'Powis Castle'  
*Astilbe hybrids*  
*Brachyscome* 'New Amethyst'—Swan River Daisy  
*Cerastium tomentosum*—Snow-in-Summer

*Cerintho major*—Honeywort  
*Choisya ternata*—Mexican Orange  
*Coreopsis verticillata* ‘Moonbeam’—Threadleaf Coreopsis  
*Correa* ‘Ivory Bells’—Australian Fuchsia  
*Dietes iridioides*—Fortnight Lily  
*Erigeron karvinskianus*—Santa Barbara Daisy  
*Festuca idahoensis* ‘Siskiyou Blue’—Blue Fescue  
*Francoa ramosa*—Maiden’s Wreath  
*Gaura lindheimeri*—Gaura  
*Geranium* ‘Nimbus’  
*Hakonechloa macra* ‘Aureola’—Japanese Forest Grass  
*Hebe* ‘Blue Elf’  
*Helianthemum*—Sunrose (3 varieties)  
*Helichrysum italicum*—Curry Plant  
*Helleborus orientalis*  
*Hemerocallis hybrids*—Daylily  
*Hydrangea macrophylla*—Bigleaf Hydrangea  
*Ixia hybrids*  
*Kniphofia* ‘Bees Sunset’—Red Hot Poker  
*Lantana sellowiana*—Trailing Lantana  
*Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Jean Davis’—English Lavender  
*Lavandula x intermedia* ‘Grosso’—Lavandin  
*Lavatera thuringiaca*—Tree Mallow  
*Linaria purpurea* ‘Canon Went’—Toadflax  
*Lithodora diffusa*  
*Loropetalum chinense*—Fringe Flower  
*Origanum vulgare* ‘Aureum’—Golden Oregano  
*Parrotia persica*—Persian Parrotia  
*Perovskia atriplicifolia*—Russian Sage  
*Persicaria* ‘Red Dragon’—Knotweed  
*Philadelphus* ‘Snowbelle’—Mock Orange  
*Pittosporum tobira* ‘Wheeler’s Dwarf’  
*Rhododendron* ‘Fragrantissima’  
*Rosa rugosa* ‘Hansa’—Sea Tomato  
*Sagina subulata*—Irish Moss  
*Scabiosa columbaria*—Pincushion Flower  
*Scaevola aemula*  
*Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’  
*Sisyrinchium striatum*—Satin Flower  
*Spiraea japonica* ‘Goldflame’  
*Stachys byzantina* ‘Silver Carpet’—Lamb’s Ears  
*Stachys macrantha*—Big Betony  
*Tanacetum parthenium* ‘Aureum’—Golden Feverfew  
*Tulbaghia violacea*—Society Garlic  
*Verbascum x hybrida*—Southern Charm Mullein  
*Viola labradorica*—Labrador Violet

*Watsonia borbonica*

## BACKYARD

*Actaea simplex* 'Brunette'—Kamchatka Bugbane

\**Adiantum aleuticum*—Five-Finger Fern, Western Maidenhair

*Armeria alliacea*—Sea Thrift

\**Aruncus dioicus*—Goat's Beard

*Astilbe hybrids*

*Astrantia* 'Roma'

\**Blechnum spicant*—Deer Fern

*Campanula persicifolia*—Peach-Leaved Bluebell

\**Claytonia siberica*—Candyflower

*Clematis montana*—Anemone Clematis

\**Dicentra formosa*—Western Bleeding Heart

\**Disporum smithii*—Fairy Bells

*Heucherella* 'Quicksilver'

*Hydrangea quercifolia*—Oakleaf Hydrangea

*Lathyrus vernus*—Spring Vetchling

*Nepeta* 'Blue Wonder'—Catmint

\**Philadelphus lewisii*—Wild Mock Orange

*Salvia elegans*—Pineapple Sage

*Saxifraga x urbium*—London Pride

*Sedum spathulifolium* 'Cape Blanco'—Coast Stonecrop

*Stachys byzantina* 'Silver Carpet'—Lamb's Ears

\**Tellima grandiflora*—Fringe Cups

*Thalictrum aquilegifolium*—Meadow Rue

*Verbena bonariensis*

*Watsonia borbonica*

\**Woodwardia fimbriata*—Giant Chain Fern

\*Native Plants

### Food Plants:

Blueberries

Boysenberries

Lemon Tree

## Tyler & Tao's Plant List

(Many of the plants in Tyler and Thao's berm are from  
Flora Organica Nursery in McKinleyville.)

Berm Plants include:

*Abelia* 'Harlequin'  
*Berberis*--Barberry  
*Ceanothus* 'Dark Star'  
*Coprosma*  
*Coreopsis*  
*Corokia*  
*Correa* 'Alba'  
*Correa harisii*  
*Dodonaea viscosa* 'Purpurea'--Purple Hopseed Bush  
*Echeveria secunda glauca*  
*Euphorbia*  
*Hebe* 'Quicksilver'  
*Hebe franciscana*  
*Hebe* red edge  
*Helianthemum*--Sunrose  
*Helichrysum italicum* --Curry Plant  
*Hypericum androsaemum*—'Dart's Gold Penny'  
*Lavandula intermedia* 'Grosso'  
*Lavandula lanata* hybrid—'Silver Frost'  
*Leptospermum* 'Dark Shadows'  
*Leucadendron* safari  
*Lophostemon confertus* 'Variegata'  
*Pelargonium sidoides*  
*Penstemon heterophylla*  
*Phormium tenax* 'Bronze Baby'—New Zealand Flax  
*Pittosporum tenuifolium*  
*Pittosporum tenuifolium*—'Marjorie Channon'  
*Prostanthera ovalifolia*  
*Punica granatum* 'Nana'--Dwarf Pomegranate  
*Rosmarinus officinalis* 'Tuscan Blue'--Rosemary  
*Rudebeckia triloba*  
*Salvia confertiflora*  
*Salvia officinalis* 'Icterina'  
*Sedum*  
*Spiraea japonica*—'Goldmound'  
*Thymus citrodorus* 'Lime'  
*Weigela florida* 'Java Red'