

outbackwithAPLD

LIFE ON TRANQUIL STREET

MARGIE GRACE, APLD
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA



Flagstone patio for
hanging out.

PHOTO CREDIT: HOLLY LEPERE



An assortment of garden produce assembled for our neighborhood garden exchange in my front yard (far left). We swap extra fruit, veggies, eggs, jam, flowers, cuttings—whatever we're growing. Recipes, seeds, and garden know-how are shared as well. My son and friend – all veggie-d up (inset).

I live in a modest and much-loved 1940s cottage on a little lane called Paseo Tranquillo—Tranquil Street—in bonny Santa Barbara. Every inch of the quarter-acre lot is pressed into service. Here you'll find multiple sitting areas (where we do much of our living), a tiny guest cottage (to lure far-flung family and friends), a staging area for our landscape design-build firm (stuff for projects is always coming and going), running space for our three cocker spaniels (where their fancy coats won't collect dirt and debris), food production (blended in with the ornamentals), constantly evolving planting combinations, and—always—a botanical experiment or two, always in flux.

The whole space has been done over three times in the 26 years I've lived here. The first go-round was mostly lawn—plus sand box, tree house, and veggie garden. I had two preschoolers at the time.

By 2000, it was time for a garden (versus a play yard). So, lawn *out*; large patio *in* (plus super cottage-y borders). The front yard instantly became the pre-

ferred hang-out spot for entertaining, chatting with passers-by, or watching the kids bike/skateboard/play ball on the street.

The next shake-up came in 2008. A new guest house displaced the veggie garden, so vegetable production moved to the front yard. A “blended garden” was born with large pots for veggies, fruit trees, and other edibles woven into the beds, curb strip, and side of the driveway. The flagstone patio remained, with a little more screening from the street, as the kids, now in high school, were past the playing-on-the-street stage.

It's been all about integrated food production ever since. We love to hang out in the front yard, enjoying fresh fruit at our fingertips, sharing fresh-from-the-garden meals with our favorite people, gathering with neighbors for our monthly garden exchange.

Given the prolonged statewide drought, I plan to re-make the front garden again this year. It will be *uber-low-water* demand. I'll keep a few veggie pots (the kids are launched, so fewer are needed). I'll do some mounding and bring in some happy color too. But that patio stays—it's the gathering place, the heart and soul, the *raison d'être* for the garden. ☺

Shallow water bowls draw critters and reflect the surrounding plantings.



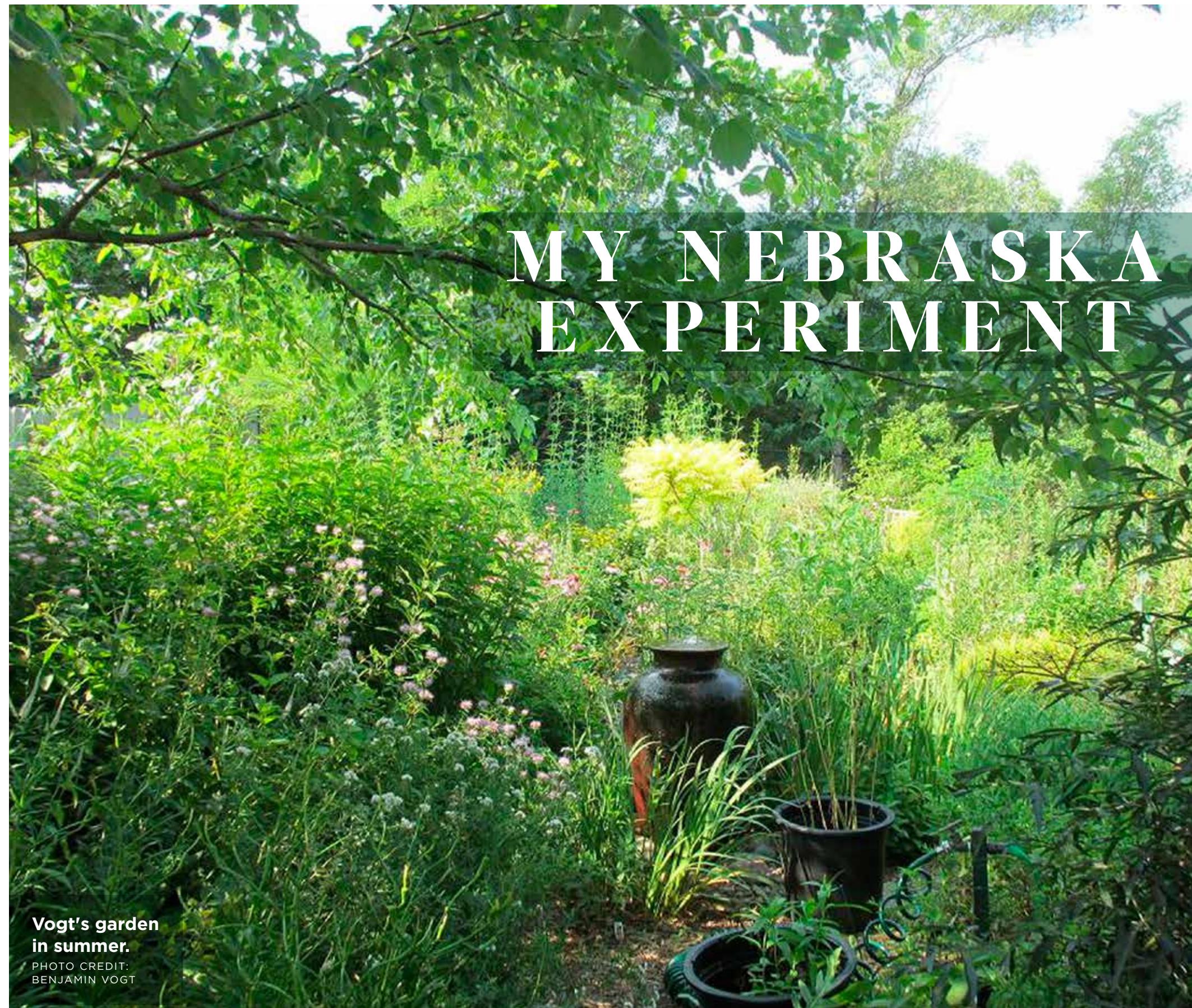
BENJAMIN VOGT, APLD
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

My garden is a trial garden that sometimes gets lucky. When we moved here in 2007 we were the street's fourth house, complete with topsoil-stripped, compacted clay that flooded and cracked in the same week. Back then I didn't know I was going to become a designer and garden writer. I plunked in what the plant tags said would work without much thought to plant or wildlife communities. After a few years I began earnestly researching plants, learning about their ecosystem services, and identifying candidates in nearby prairies.

What my uninformed, haphazard, early gardening taught me was to enjoy the unexpected – plants that failed for whatever reason, and plants that moved or diminished one year only to pop back even bigger the next. I left the garden up for winter because I was lazy, not for interest or hibernating pollinators in stems. I let plants duke it out – still do – and as they compete weeds vanish and water infiltrates soil.

The main 1,500-square-foot garden has turned into 4,500 square feet in the last two years. Out front we tore up 600 square feet of lawn—almost the entire yard—and I came up with a neighbor-pleasing plan featuring 100 percent prairie plants. This fall I scalped the back lawn—about 2,000 square feet—exposed as much soil as I could, and sowed a pound or two of seed while planting 70 divisions and plugs grown from my garden.

Who knows what will happen. While clients come to visit and pick plants they like, I simply think of my landscape as a massive trial bed masquerading as something wildly intentional. But the garden isn't just for me; it's for every pollinator and bird. The idea that what we do with nature's echo empowers us to make a difference. Gardens should be revolutions that wake us to our world.



MY NEBRASKA EXPERIMENT

Vogt's garden in summer.

PHOTO CREDIT:
BENJAMIN VOGT



FOUR-SEASON PATIO LIVING

ROBERTA BRAEGELMANN, APLD TUCSON, ARIZONA

I garden in what I think of as a typical lot for my Central Tucson neighborhood—not large, probably 140 feet by 65 feet. The house was born in 1947 and I've lived here for 26 years. It is the only house I've ever owned. And everything about it says, "me." As I looked at it recently through the eye of a camera, I've gained a better appreciation of what I've created. It really is a comfortable, fun, soothing backyard that I love.

When I moved in I wasn't a designer, but straight away the first thing I had to do was take out two palm trees. There is a small area in Tucson where palm trees belong and are native, but in my back yard? No. There was a little bit of grass, and while it was fun for a while as a new homeowner, it isn't my style. I grew up in Phoenix—I'm a desert rat from way back—and I just can't rationalize the water needed for grass.

Now the backyard is a mix of patios inter-planted with low-water perennials, aloes that can take the hot sun, and wildflowers that sprout from seeds dropped as I drag clippings around the yard. My husband and I joke that there's a patio for every season and time of the day at our house. The north patio is better in the early morning before the summer sun can start heating you up. The barbecue patio, also the "dining room," is open to the sky and stars.

We consider the back covered patio the biggest room of the house with two separate seating areas, one anchored by my grandfather's toolbox as a coffee table. In the winter, we warm up the space with a tall-stemmed propane heater. In the summer, I lower shades over the west-facing salvaged window frames to keep the afternoon



We expanded the barbecue patio and created additional seating by turning the low wall into a bench (above). Two separate seating areas allow for intimate gatherings or larger festivities. The plant palette includes seasonal annuals and hardy, low-water perennials, including several species of aloe.

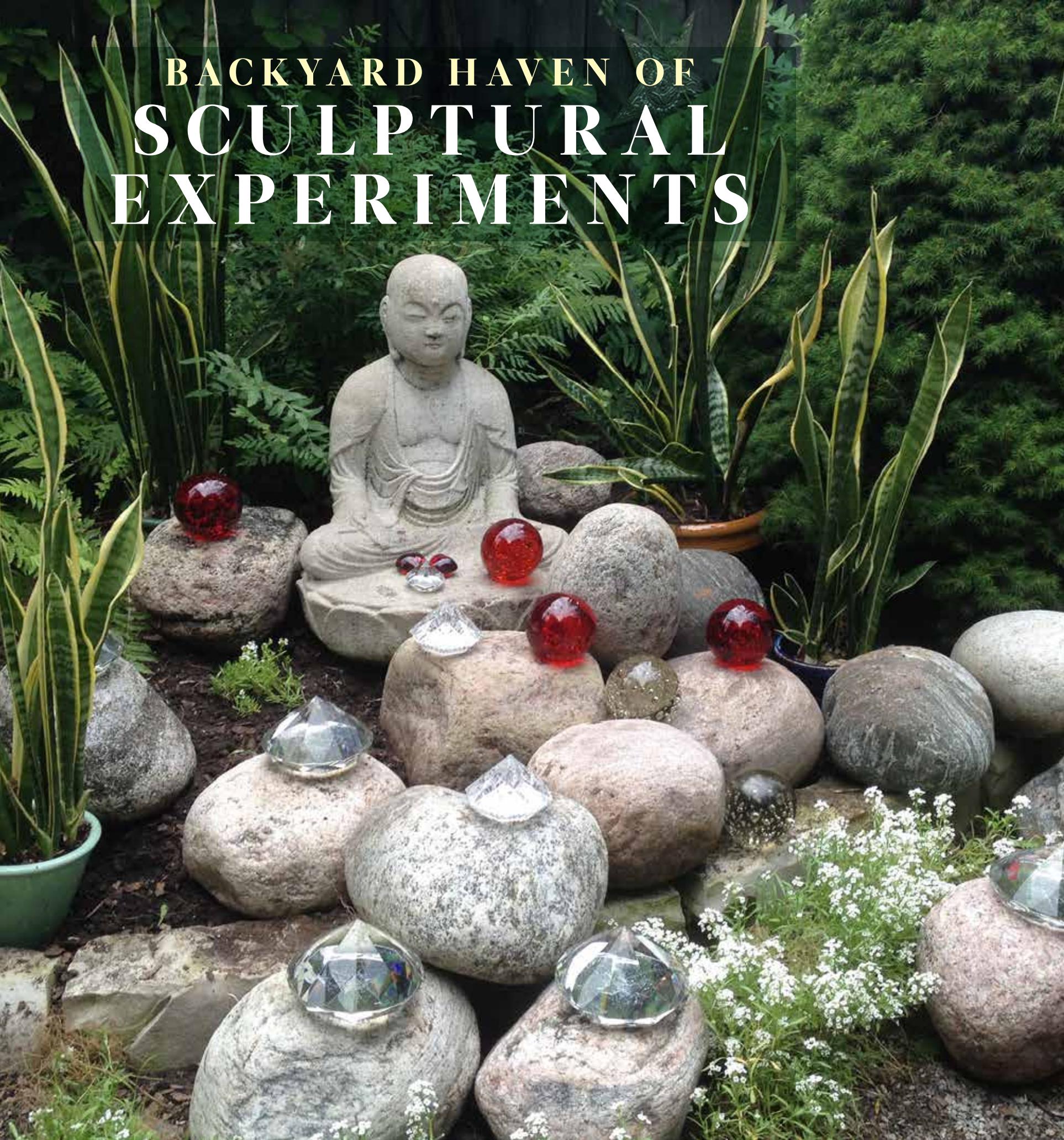
sun out. When the television is on inside, I'm usually outside. It has sort of been a joke, but it's a true joke, that my favorite thing to do is sit on any porch and watch the plants grow. In the front yard, which is filled with agaves and cactus, that's a particularly slow process.

A key feature of the yard is a galvanized corrugated fence that we built after repairing a wooden fence for a second time. This fence will be here long after I'm gone, as will the rusted steel posts, a wonderful contrast with the galvanized panels. I designed the patio roof to match and shortly thereafter added the galvanized stock tank planters. I freshen those up with seasonal color. The rest of the yard is lower maintenance. In the mornings I do what I like to call my "sip and snip" rounds with coffee in one hand and clippers in the other. I can't get too involved. Don't want to spill my coffee.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERTA BRAEGELMANN

BACKYARD HAVEN OF SCULPTURAL EXPERIMENTS



outbackwithAPLD

W. GARY SMITH, APLD
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

We live in Toronto's "Little Italy," a big neighborhood of small row houses, each typically with little gardens in both front and back. Our back garden is a 24 × 24-foot square that connects the kitchen to my studio. One of my favorite things in life is to sit out there in the middle of the day, with the cats and a cup of coffee, thinking "nobody knows I'm here." It's not an integrated design or horticultural showplace, but more of a simple framework where I can arrange and rearrange potted plants and sculptural bits and pieces. Some of the pieces can be challenging for visitors to enjoy: a Buddha statue I picked up in a junk shop in Austin is missing an arm, and disembodied baby doll heads show up in little niches here and there.

I play around a lot with bundles of sticks and grasses, or broken tools, or stones that have followed me to Toronto from homes in Pennsylvania and Texas. I'm always moving things around to test different juxtapositions, and when I do I try to keep my thinking self at bay, so serendipity will have a chance to show me things I might not have thought of on my own.

My work frequently takes me away from home, and I spend too much time on airplanes and in airports. But when I'm in Toronto I'm often hanging out in our garden. It's an intimate place of personal narrative, and I'm grateful for the solitude and renewal that I find there. ☺

The *Cotinus* seeds fly around and sprout everywhere, but the weeding is worth it for the fabulous fall display.



PHOTOGRAPH BY W. GARY SMITH