



LIVING ON

EASY STREET

A CALIFORNIA GARDEN
DESIGNER TURNS HER CITY
LOT INTO A FAMILY REFUGE.

Margie Grace's bungalow is on a street called Paseo Tranquilo. Loosely translated, that means "easy street," and her garden captures the laid-back spirit of the name. Roses and Peruvian lilies (*Astroemeria*) fill flower beds in front of the porch. She designed the fountain so that water bubbles out of a ceramic sphere, flows to the edges of a stone tabletop, and splashes quietly into an old planter.

BY MARTY ROSS PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDMUND BARR PRODUCED BY ANDREA CAUGHEY





Margie Grace's first act when she designed the garden around her 1940s bungalow in Santa Barbara, California, was a magic trick. "How about we disappear the lawn?" she asked her sons, Matt and Ry. They were against it, but she argued that big lawns are not practical where the average rainfall is only 17 inches a year. The lawn had to go.

No one misses it. The front yard is now an exuberant cottage garden, designed to suit the dry California summer, laid out around a sheltered and welcoming flagstone patio. The patio resembles a giant jigsaw puzzle of rock, set in sand with woolly thyme and other plants growing in the cracks. Adirondack chairs and a garden settee are tucked comfortably among a tumble of roses and perennial flowers, pots full of handsome succulents, and a refreshing fountain. The neighbors have a view through the vine-covered fence, and that's just as it should be, Margie says.

'Sally Holmes' roses frame a view of the front garden (left). Margie found the big urn in the discount area of a garden shop; a large crack made no difference to her. Vines screen the sitting area (above) from the street. Margie, partner Dawn Close, and sons Ry and Matt hang out on the porch (below).





"The front yard is for everybody. It should be a contribution to the community." It's an escape as well. When she and her partner, Dawn Close, or her teenage sons relax in the front yard, they're enveloped in tranquility. "The feeling comes from the way you're embraced by the space," Margie says.

The property is a tidy 60x150 feet, a typical city lot, with the house in the middle. Margie's garden design studio is in the backyard. For the outdoor living spaces, she has applied the same strategies of garden planning that she uses for her clients. When designing a garden, she focuses on the space that remains after a client's house, garage, and other buildings have claimed their share, looking for what she calls "the opportunities of the site." She views the garden from inside the house, and the house from the garden, to decide where the quiet sitting areas should be and which spaces are best for flower beds or children's play areas.

Her backyard is a lively and colorful space. There's a small lawn, but most of the area is given over to a

Margie's whimsical sprinkler (right) twirls among the flowers. "I get a good giggle when it goes on," she says. On a fieldstone table, pots of succulents are a striking centerpiece (above left). The rock slab, which matches the paving material, is raised to coffee table height on two blocks of stone. Still water reflects the light and shadows (top).





garden. Flowers are allowed to spill over the gravel path in casual style; fussiness simply doesn't suit her, Margie says. Drought-tolerant plants are her first choices. She places things that need more moisture close to a twirling sprinkler with a water-conserving timer.

Margie made the garden on a shoestring budget—less than \$4,000. She saved money by using salvaged materials, cuttings and divisions of plants from friends and neighbors, and bargain finds. There's one aspect she wouldn't compromise: "I wanted to make it beautiful," she says. "None of it works unless it's beautiful." 🐾

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Trees and shrubs flourish in big pots (above) in a small Asian-inspired garden outside the design studio's French doors. Margie and Dawn relax in Adirondack chairs with Mona, their cocker spaniel. One crock has been turned into a fountain (left) with a pair of ceramic dolphins as spigots.