



beyond a
rainbow

A COLOR-DRIVEN CALIFORNIA GARDEN HAS **LESSONS FOR EVERYONE**

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BEFORE



Left: Mary Ellen Guffey tends the garden of her home in a gated Santa Barbara community. She worked with her residents' association, which is committed to open boundaries, and with landscape designer Margie Grace to arrive at a plan for a walled garden that pleased everyone. The construction period (*inset*) demanded a leap of faith, but once the garden was planted, the walls vanished from view. **Right:** Mounds of ruby-red bougainvillea 'Barbara Karst', purple Mexican sage, and blue-green echium flank the dry stream bed that runs under a tiny footbridge linking the garden to its wild setting. **Preceding pages:** Iceland poppies, lavender, and snapdragons in Mary Ellen's garden.

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Mary Ellen Guffey has learned never to leave anything to chance, particularly when your garden is small and your dreams are big. From tending window boxes and African violets during her and husband George's graduate-school days to cultivating a small courtyard garden behind their present home in a gated Santa Barbara community, there has been very little she hasn't tried growing, and a lot she has learned in the process.

"After obtaining our degrees and before striking out on our career paths, George said I could choose where we lived," Mary Ellen explains. "He knew I had to have a garden... so I chose Southern California."

It was an obvious move for a woman who claims she's not a professional—just a simple gardener with a passion for flowers

and color. But after years of maintaining a large hillside garden in Malibu, the couple downsized to a contemporary house in 1994 and immediately faced two challenges: first, how to keep critters from the nearby wild meadow out of the garden (surround it with a low wall), and second, how to convince the residents' association that a walled garden would fit into a setting of lawns, shrubs, and open boundaries.

Mindful of the association's desire to preserve the wide-open appeal of the community's setting in the natural landscape, the Guffeys and landscape designer Margie Grace came up with a scheme for a low-profile enclosure that everyone found acceptable. The critters were excluded, and the garden—spread like a floral carpet within its low walls—segues comfortably into its setting of well-manicured lawns and wild meadow.

'Tuscan Sun'



Above: Blue pansies, white alyssum, and mauve nemesia weave a floral carpet around the central fountain. Mary Ellen turned the terrace into an outdoor room. From there she can enjoy the distant view of the Pacific Ocean.

Top center: Mary Ellen in her garden.
Left: Every opportunity is taken to use ornamental containers that extend the small garden's planting opportunities. Regular deadheading keeps annuals and roses looking perfect and blooming lavishly. The soft pink tint of the stonework continues the sunny theme.

To learn more about Mary Ellen's planting techniques and about the gorgeous trailing fuchsia that is named for her, visit traditionalhome.com.



Then came the planting: Grace's plan divided the small courtyard into eight flower beds that Mary Ellen quickly planted with 40 rose bushes and loads of annuals and perennials. Her choices were guided exclusively by her favorite palette, which, she explains, revolves around apricot. "It's my favorite rose color, and 'Brandy', 'Just Joey', and 'Bronze Star' have it to perfection." She expanded her sunny repertoire by adding gold, orange, yellow, coral, and rust tints, and complemented this warm array with masses of purple-, blue-, and lavender-tinted annuals and perennials. The range of perennials she grows is limited; alstroemeria, lavender, rosemary, and bougainvillea make the cut. "I'm reluctant to grow anything that takes precious garden space but blooms for only a limited period," she reasons. "That's why annuals are my first choice—they are easily changed to keep color coming all year round and fill gaps in winter after the roses are pruned."

"Roses are the backbone of the garden," she says. During summer, when they're at their best, she punches up the color with annual rudbeckias, zinnias, and French marigolds, plus blue- and purple-flowered germander and lavender. Alstroemerias with copper, peach, and butter-yellow flowers blend perfectly with the main theme. Then, in winter, Iceland poppies, pansies, nemesia, snapdragons, and alyssum take over.

Mary Ellen, who was once a garden writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, cautions gardeners not to let their schemes dissolve into chaos. "I enjoy controlled exuberance," she says. "But it's especially important to exercise color control in a small garden. Working out a palette and sticking to it makes life so much easier and can prevent expensive mistakes." ■

Landscape designer: Margie Grace

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