

Our Favorite Before-Afters : What we learned, why we smile

Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich walk you through time as well as beautiful spaces to give you ideas, laughs, hopes and consolation in your own gardening efforts. This creative and entertaining team has worked together for over 20 years to design, plant, renovate and capture gardens, on camera and in "how to" books and articles. In this talk they cover some of their favorite projects and subjects and share the lessons learned from each.

- 1. From Curt's lawnless yard we learned:** Garden for fun but work scientifically.
And we smile because: he said "I'm never going to figure out what's going on out here in the yard, and I've realized that's okay. A fledgling cardinal perched on my foot while I read the paper today..."
- 2. From Deb's planting and painting we learned:** That a dooryard is a private space even when it's visible to the public.
And we smile over stapled blue jean shorts and a rubber chicken as garden art.
- 3. From Curt we learned:** If you can't shred it, spread it anyway.
And we smile because more people are embracing the tenet "leave the leaves."
- 4. At the Cleveland Botanical Gardens conservatory we learned:** One gardener may be a great builder while another excels at tending what's there. Both are treasures.
And we smile because Cleveland did great things, and so can we all.
- 5. From seasonal change at Dawyck Botanical Garden we learned:** Every day's view is precious, and even if you can't walk a path you can still follow it mentally.
And we smile because benches help you maintain focus over time, even if you sit there very rarely.
- 6. From our eventual extension of the front path we learned:** Pedestrians should not be asked to share the car's route.
And we smile because we beat the rectangles and straight lines that box us in.
- 7. From staking a culver's root we learned:** Don't prop what should stand on its own.
And we smile because it's another proof that if you fix light and water issues, plants take care of everything else on their own.
- 8. From Mary Kay's hillside path and a student's spider sense we learned:** To doodle or scribble a pretty path but follow a dog or a sheep for the simplest, easiest route.
And we smile because in a small world we should garden for posterity; you never know when a garden you plant will be purchased by a relative.
- 9. From Tim and the horsetail dig we learned:** If weeding is what's there to be done there can be real joy in simply giving that your very best effort.
And we smile because we can move mountains by harnessing the competitive energy of siblings.

- 10. From the mulberry bed at the Detroit Zoo we learned:** It works to aim your garden at your viewer, and keep that direction in mind from the outset.
And we smile because answers that have worked for a hundred generations should be given a try. Wattle fences work.
- 11. From Joan's corner garden we learned:** Make the soil work and your garden will work for you, too.
And we smile (ruefully) because if there are no worms it will be a slow garden.
- 12. From Cotton and the tent caterpillars we learned:** Manual control is often quicker, cheaper and more effective than any other option.
And we smile because manual is messy and until our dying days the preying mantis who shared our living room will come to mind as the perfect example.
- 13. From Jack's city courtyard we learned:** If you first make room for people in a garden, there will always be room for everything else.
And we smile because beauty doesn't reside in a garden but in the gardener.
- 14. From Mitch and Karen's front walk we learned:** Keep it simple.
And we smile because if you can't stand a particular sight but can't change it, a simple fix is to create something better to look at along a divergent line.
- 15. From Sue's pine-filled entrance we learned:** In an overcrowded landscape it's best to treat plants in batches. If one of a batch displeases you throw out *all* of that plant.
And we smile because it's so clear that space is the thing most landscapes need.
- 16. From Pat's crescent walkway we learned:** To work *with* the garden bones. Follow their lead, don't hide them or contradict them.
And we smile because all it takes to have a friendlier neighborhood is an open porch and a couple of chairs.
- 17. From Marjorie's red door we learned:** Doors are visual and mental magnets. Choose and place garden features to extend a door's effect.
And we smile because many people don't recognize that even minor changes to a house walls and roof may greatly change a garden.
- 18. From Sally's corner lot we learned:** Fences grow faster than hedges.
And we smile because arranging to be invited out more often can begin by reducing the size of one's patio.
- 19. From Catherine's crane garden we learned:** Keep what grows, move what doesn't.
And we smile because a plant that is going to be overhead must for a time be in your face.
- 20. From Betty and Dick's front yard patio we learned:** There is no quick fix for root damage. Time is key to return a tree to good health and easy care.
And we smile because even when it's loss-generated, change is opportunity for adventure in a garden.

- 21. From Hidden Lake Garden's conifer collection we learned:** Dwarf plants aren't.
And we smile because boulders and benches are vital as yardsticks.
- 22. From Barb's crabapple and spruce we learned:** Our plants shouldn't bully us.
And we smile because one tree cutter can keep a ground crew of 4 busy all day. So it's not a power saw that speeds the work, but more hands for the clean up.
- 23. From our catmint path we learned:** Most gardeners do more cutting and removing than growing.
And we smile because our pets like our garden, too.
- 24. From our rejuvenated bee balm we learned:** Plants that run, need to.
And we smile because we can make gardening simple by growing what stays put and lives long.
- 25. From Virginia's house-doubling addition we learned:** Massive changes require massed plants.
And we smile because we *could* have used fewer, smaller plants, except for the "no green bananas" rule.
- 26. From Stephan and Susan's front foundation changes we learned:** Put two identical plants in flanking positions and two things happen. First, we'll focus entirely on what's between them. Second, one of the plants will grow differently than the other.
And we smile because gardeners who are medical people so often and so fervently use the phrase, "Can't we save it?"
- 27. From ash borers we learned:** Nothing is permanent.
And we smile because we can make a difference that will last for generations by diversifying what we plant as we replace blight elms and borer-killed ash.
- 28. From Nigella's blue flowers and horned seed pods we learned:** To keep a journal because we will otherwise forget wonderful things.
And we smile because everyone has in them a bit of love-in-a-mist as well as devil-in-a-bush.
- 29. From an abused Japanese maple we learned:** Never discount a plant's will to live.
And we smile because talking to plants focuses our attention. Drive cross town after a frigid night to give a tree a pep talk and you won't soon forget its care.
- 30. From a butterfly bench we learned:** To give ourselves presents but always give up something whenever we do.
And we smile because it's important to cultivate strong and ingenious friends.
- 31. From the solar arbors we learned:** Light is a moving thing best enjoyed in person. Play with it but don't expect to catch it, especially in pictures.
And we smile because mirrors are fun in gardens, as long as they are plastic.

- 32. From Julie's path and arbor we learned:** If you open a door you *will* look through it. If the view's unfortunate and you must keep a door closed, make it a pretty door.
And we smile because it's possible to pay respect to trees and shrubs we remove by recycling them as artful and useful objects.
- 33. From "going digital" we learned:** Make the most of every change. Find something to smile about and soon there will be even more reason to smile.
And we do smile because it's easier to plan than plant, and digital photography offers hope for those who can't visualize from pencil lines on graph paper.
- 34. From Sandra's herb garden we learned:** A garden room can make any space feel more comfortable for people, but outdoor rooms almost always need to be bigger than their indoor counterparts.
And we smile because it's good to talk to people about your garden dreams. Who knows when a maker of twig trellises maybe in your line at the hardware?
- 35. From a purple sedum's move we learned:** The right time to do it is when you can. After having moved just about every kind of plant at what's said to be it's "wrong" time, we now apologize and keep going, for most plants are forgiving.
And we smile because flowers dazzle but foliage makes the garden go 'round.
- 36. From Shirley and Steve's front yard re-do we learned:** Most homes no longer need "foundation plants" to block cold prairie wind or hide rough-hewn log bases. Move plants out so people can wash windows and paint walls.
And we smile because our changes change other landscapes nearby.
- 37. From Pam and Doug's *Parrotia* tree moving we learned:** It helps to prune roots 12 and 6 months ahead of time when you cannot dig up the tree's entire root system.
And we smile because friends join in, even we ask them out of the blue.
- 38. From the gazebo garden we learned:** If you have a great diversity of plants in a garden, don't expect any one to star over seasons and years. Give that job to a gazebo, build an arbor, commission a sculpture...
And we smile because we can all get a lot of mileage from a garden. We can use its photos on stationery, report on that day's bloom in letters to lonely friends, study its birds, ask neighbors in to cut flowers and much more.
- 39. From Margaret's shady city lot we learned:** To help people avoid guilt when a plant fails. We encourage counting that plant toward the life list and moving on.
And we smile because when you ask friends over to help in a garden project, hiring just one person to work along with you can keep the whole effort going.
- 40. From Russ and Ginny's courtyard/horseshoe pit we learned:** To choose fencing with openings in the panels and at the ground. Free air flow keeps heat from building up and cold air from pooling as it drains down slopes.
And we smile because fences make for good neighbors *and* happy marriages.

- 41. From moving Tom's Japanese maple we learned:** Almost anything can be moved if someone will keep it well watered afterward.
And we smile because every gardener should keep the neighbors wondering. Give them things to talk about, like when Tom walked his tree down the road.
- 42. From Hank and Sharon's wooded garden we learned:** Every day, take a walk in your garden to look and talk. Forbid working as you walk -- even to pull a weed.
And we smile because they said, "to be able to *not* work, carry a glass of wine."
- 43. From our Detroit Zoo garden we learned:** To be very grateful for friends' help and generous with our time, because it comes back ten-fold.
And we smile because having a plan on paper makes everything a big group does seem more manageable, *even if we almost always "wing it"!*
- 44. From the "Faux Pond" we learned:** Digging down is as good as building up, to get relief from flat terrain, and raised beds in a dry garden only make things drier.
And we smile because our faux pond fooled a duck into landing there.
- 45. From tadpoles and caterpillars we learned:** Pay attention to the little things and your mind just keeps on growing.
And we smile because we're greeted by toads' trilling each time we come home.
- 46. From tending Mom's landscape we learned:** Most people don't even notice that a shrub's been cut back to stubs, *and* the shrubs make great comebacks, if you do the cutting right before bud break in spring.
And we smile because a relative's landscape is a perfect experimental station.
- 47. From Cindy's front yard we learned:** When the lines are beautiful, even the untrained eye of a passerby can be pleased by those lines alone.
And we smile because if you want a perfect hedge, have an engineer plant it.
- 48. From Barb & Greg's Japanese maple and arbs we learned:** Give it room; it can look good now *and* have the room it needs to look good when it's full grown.
And we smile because it's been 20 years and it looks like we imagined it would.
- 49. From botanical garden trial areas we learned:** Not to crowd annuals, either. For earlier display, they use *larger* starts but keep spacing the same.
And we smile because people are always so surprised when their annuals grow.
- 50. From Sue & Jerry's landscape makeover we learned:** Other peoples' confidence helps us succeed when we undertake a big project.
And we smile because one law student left alone to make his stone by stone decisions about 4 tons of rock resulted in a beautiful statement.
- 51. From our pond experience at home we learned:** When you find a landscape feature you like, embrace it and preserve its place as things evolve around it.
And we smile because the water garden keeps revealing more dimension, something new coming to our attention every year.

- 52. From Holden Arboretum's garden project we learned:** To celebrate others' accomplishments -- institutional gardeners face all the challenges we do and really love to hear from visitors that all their work was worth it.
And we smile because they, too, see the only answer to deer is fencing.
- 53. From Ann & Bob's front entry renovation we learned:** Even a landscape of brand new small plants can be beautiful right now when the plants are spaced just a bit closer to their own kind so voids between plant groups have character, too.
And we smile because it's only going to get better!
- 54. From Betty's back yard hedge we learned:** Once you put a big plant in its place with hard cuts, stick with the program to keep the plant healthy, and be patient.
And we smile because clients believe us that even arbs can grow back.
- 55. From our sunken garden project we learned:** To keep our chin up. When the garden's bones are sound, every step is forward and there is always next year.
And we smile because separating a yard into rooms makes it possible to shut the door on apparent chaos when we can't work on a project.
- 56. From using Mom's Japanese maple to demo winter protection we learned:** That some things are just fun and worth doing for that reason alone.
And we smile because we keep coming up with something new!