

# Canadian Living

MAY 2005

SMART SOLUTIONS FOR EVERYDAY LIVING



## FRESH STARTS

WE SHOW YOU HOW!

- Your Look PAGE 40
- Your Friends PAGE 81
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### MOM KNOWS BEST

Why You Should Go with Your Gut

### WIN!

A Home Theatre Worth \$13,000

### SMART SOLUTIONS

For 5 Everyday Disasters

### 18 TIPS

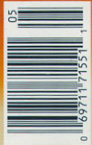
for Staying Healthy, Wealthy & Wise

## Outdoor Living

- Garden Lights in a Snap
- Backyard Getaway
- Decor Touches (Most Under \$20!)

Shrimp and Asparagus Crêpes  
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\$3.50



# best-dressed garden

Fashion designer Susan Lee combines whimsy with exotica to create a jewel of a garden and an outdoor living room.



"I wanted to make a whimsical garden," says Susan. To provide a focus and set the mood, Susan and her brother, Bruce, built the cottagelike shed at the end of the garden.



Completely at home in her garden, Susan enjoys a summer meal with friends.


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TEXT BY JO CALVERT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER YIP

**FORM, COLOUR, PATTERN, TEXTURE** – these are all part of the palette for fashion designer Susan Lee. All that – and her creative flair – shines in Susan's Toronto garden. A sweep of flagstone walk underfoot, a swoop of arbour overhead and a generous step-up deck carve strong shapes out of the long lot. Exuberant foliage dotted with flowers, and unexpected exotic sculptures here and there, add softness and detail. And when Susan dresses up the deck for evening entertaining – with candles, rich carpets and a banquette of burnished silk pillows – the garden becomes an intimate and glamorous outdoor room. ▶





The first autumn, all Susan did was plant two-metre cedars along the fence. "This provided privacy and a framework for the garden to take shape," she says.

Susan is head designer for the Spanner Collection, a Canadian womenswear label that sells throughout North America. When she first stepped into the yard, her artist's eye immediately saw the possibilities. "One of the main reasons I bought this house 3½ years ago," says Susan, "was the potential I saw in the garden." She wanted it to embrace her love of entertaining friends but also visualized it as an "urban sanctuary" for herself.

"My job as a clothing designer is very stressful and deadline-driven, and I wanted the

garden to be my refuge. I wanted it to have little scenes or vignettes, charming seating areas and places to pause and ponder."

One of those places – a wrought-iron bench heaped with cushions – is tucked under the trees beside the wisteria-covered archway halfway down the lawn. Ferns and rhododendrons are planted here, and Susan points out a bronze dragonfly cradled by the clematis and wisteria.

A gracious hostess, Susan entices even birds and butterflies into her garden to enjoy ►

## Beauty by Design

- First thing, Susan and Steve dug up and potted the perennials they wanted to save, then used a rototiller to root out the rampant goutweed that was choking the existing garden.
- To break up the heavy clay soil, Susan dug in triple mix and sand before replanting.
- She fertilizes with sheep manure and feeds her acid-loving azaleas and rhododendrons by digging coffee grounds, pinecones and pine needles into the soil.
- To reduce weed growth and improve moisture retention, Susan mulches around the perennials with cocoa beans.
- "Steve rigged a simple irrigation system on a timer," she says. "This keeps the garden watered even when I'm travelling."
- To prepare her garden for winter Susan adds a thick layer of triple mix around the perennials. She protects the cedars with burlap and mulches around them with bark.



*Crococsmia*, an annual bulb in Susan's Zone 5 backyard, sport graceful orange-red plumes and spiky foliage. ABOVE: Partway down the garden a leafy arbour shelters a birdhouse built by Susan's late father. LEFT: Susan wanted her "personal haven to showcase little treasures." Here, a mask brought back from Mexico peeks out from the leaves.



a meal. "Beebalm, buddleia, *Gaura lindheimeri* 'Whirling Butterflies,' giant impatiens and lobelia all help to keep my garden a haven for them."

With the help of her partner, Steve Calles, Susan's backyard creation has become just

what she imagined it could be – stylish, eclectic and a comfortable fit. "I spend a couple of hours in the early morning working in my garden and full days whenever time allows," she says. "It's good for the soul." ▶

ABOVE: To guide visitors along the walk to the deck after dark, Steve installed some low mushroom-shaped fixtures. "It looks like fairyland when they're lit," says Susan. "They make little moonbeams along the flagstone pathway."

RIGHT AND OPPOSITE PAGE: Pots of blooming plants are stacked on the lower deck, where Susan's lounge seating and a dining table with chairs create an outdoor living room. Candles, colourful area rugs and pillows covered in embroidered silk, scarves and sari fabrics are brought outside and heaped on the built-in bench when Susan and Steve entertain. A decades-old hydrangea hedge along the lot line forms a beautiful backdrop.









**TOP LEFT:** Susan picked up this tropical "mystery plant" at a local fruit market. She loves the purple blooms, so she keeps the plant in a pot and moves it indoors for the winter.

**TOP RIGHT:** Hardy perennial black-eyed Susans create just one of many sunny spots in their namesake's garden.

**CENTRE:** In this designer's garden, even the watering can is colour coordinated.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Asters add their own red and purple notes to the warm colour theme of Susan's garden. "This year I was partial to oranges and reds," she says, "to coordinate with my salsa stripe cushions on the arbour chair, glider and recliner."

**For shopping information, see page 236.**