

A backyard sanctuary is built on scented plants and found objects

by Valerie Easton

photographed by Mike Siegel

JEAN YOHO HASN'T missed the swimming pool for a minute. One of the first things she did when she bought her house in Shoreline 14 years ago was fill in the backyard pool. While it cut down on her water bill, she was left with a flat, empty expanse of ground.

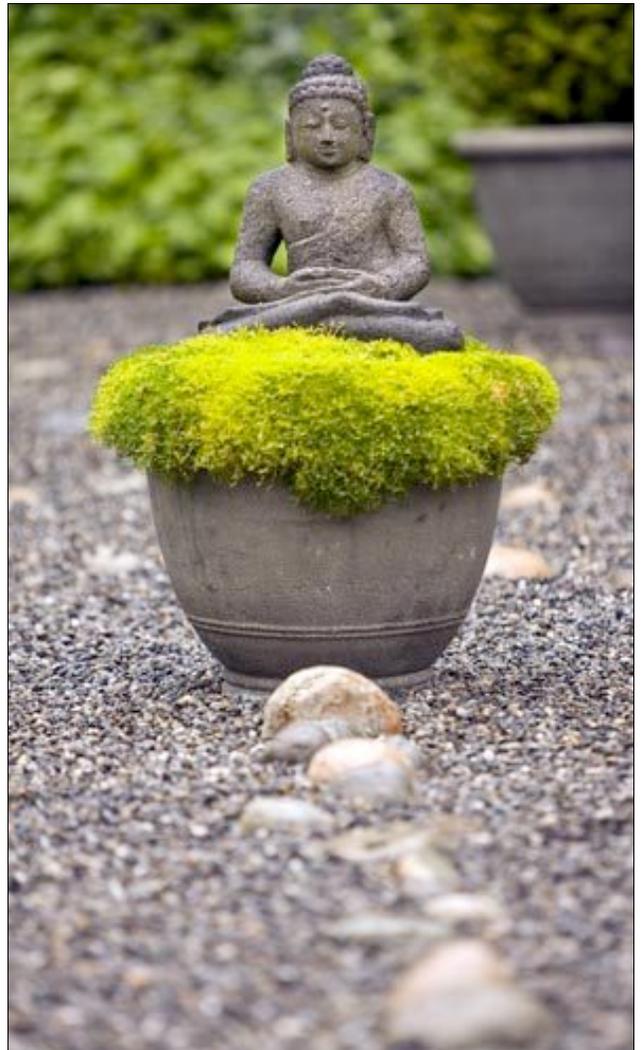
Not everyone would have looked at all that gravel and seen an opportunity for walking meditation. Yoho used ribbons of beach stones and pots of little conifers to outline a labyrinth that she regularly walks before a long day of work as a radiation therapist at Swedish Cancer Institute.

Yoho's garden is her sanctuary, a place to relax and recharge from a job that demands so much of her. Her workplace is literally subterranean, so at home the windows are left bare to capture all possible light and connection to the garden. "I decorated my house from the inside out," says Yoho. "I color-coordinated it looking out the windows."

To make such transparency work, Yoho needed to create some privacy. Her 1950s house had a typical flat lawn, open on all sides to views of the neighbors. She effectively screened her garden with a gutsy cedar hedge, which grew rapidly into a dense, green wall. Yoho may have planted herself a yearly pruning chore, but she also created a dramatic entry to the property, carved right through the hedge.

Walk through the verdant passage and you find yourself in a green-and-white garden planted for fragrance. White-flowering lilacs, magnolias, viburnum and sarcococca fill the air with sweet and spicy scents through the seasons. Yoho points out the white trim on the house and white picket fences, saying, "I'm Swiss. I like everything to match."

While the front garden reflects Yoho's traditional side, she gardens



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A stone Buddha meditates at the entrance to the labyrinth, setting a mood of repose reinforced by the quiet palette of moss, gravel and stones.



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...time the next garden renovation. Some decorative ones, she gardens more loosely around back, where she's replaced lawn with ground covers and found-object vignettes. "This place is a half inch of hardpan on top of clay soil, so I'm constantly amending," she says. Overlapping layers of groundcovers, including moss, ornamental grasses and thyme, thrive in all the manure and compost she's hauled in. What was once concrete, lawn and pool is now gravel, scotch moss and meditation. Teacups, doorknobs and birdhouses adorn fence posts; sweet peas clamber up the fence; and checkerboard pavers echo the pattern indoors on the kitchen floor.

"I try to keep things maintainable because I work full time and have a dog," says Yoho. Nevertheless, she's named her garden "Never Enough Thyme," and not just because so much of her life is gobbled up tending it. Twenty-three varieties of thyme, from lemon to woolly, carpet the garden around stones, a recycled bedstead, mossy bicycle and collections of decorative spheres.

A bowl holds a pile of pale stones engraved with words Yoho believes are central to garden-making. The words on the rocks — like "wonder," "believe" and "imagine" — also describe the artistry Yoho has brought to creating her unique garden retreat.

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After studying books of labyrinth designs, Jean Yoho chose a classic pattern, altering it to fit the dimensions of the garden once she'd filled in an old swimming pool. "I have my umbrella and I just walk it in any weather," she says of her daily labyrinth ritual.



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Yoho created an Alice-in-Wonderland-like scene by planting the seat of an old bedstead with tufts of elfin thyme, then surrounding it with a playful mix of spheres, spikes and pots.



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Yoho pauses behind a white picket fence with her sweet Cyble, a golden Lab she rescued from a shelter.

Ideas for creating on a budget

"I'm Miss Frugal," says Jean Yoho. "I shop at Value Village." In the garden, her thriftiness not only cuts costs but lends a personal, quirky charm. A few tricks and tips:

- **Get rid of the lawn.** Tearing out most of the lawn and the swimming pool greatly reduced her water bill. It also left space for a simple labyrinth, the garden's most distinctive feature.
- **Customize an inexpensive shed.** Her garden shed is a Home Depot model, customized with vintage windows, planted window boxes and a mirrored door to reflect and visually enlarge the garden.
- **Use vintage items.** Yoho picked up an old bicycle (further aged by moss affixed with a glue gun), metal pump, teakettles and a bedstead, below, she found at a garage sale. These things give the garden a unique patina and a comfortable, lived-in feel.