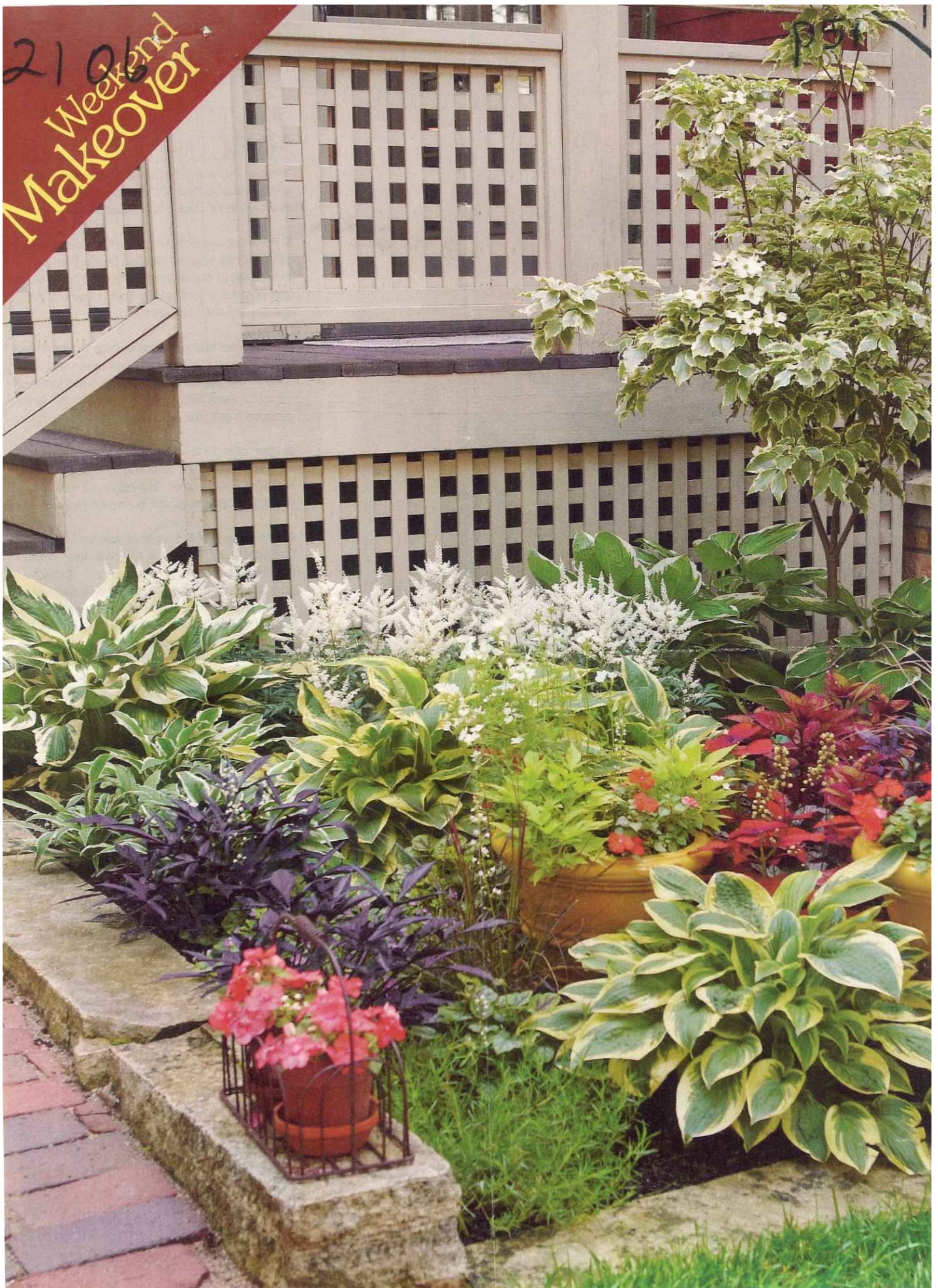


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Weekend
Makeover



SEEING CLEARLY NOW

Place several inches of colorful marbles in the bottom of a clear glass pillar, add water to just below the marbles' surface, and—voilà!—you have made a perfect home for hyacinths in minutes. The container supports the top-heavy flowers and keeps them upright as they bloom. The marbles allow room for root development while suspending the bulbs above the water.

MATERIALS

6×12-inch glass vase
Swirl glass marbles
4 hyacinth bulbs



PRECHILLING HYACINTH BULBS

You can buy prechilled hyacinth bulbs at many garden retail outlets. Or you can prechill the bulbs yourself. Just follow these steps:

- Purchase hyacinth bulbs from a garden center or mail-order source. Choose plump, firm bulbs in an array of colors from white to pinks to blues and purples, with single or double flowers. All the flowers are intensely fragrant.
- Place your bulbs in a paper bag. Count ahead 12 to 14 weeks on the calendar, then write that date on the bag. Store the bag of bulbs in the refrigerator away from apples or other fruits, which produce a gas that can cause the bulbs to rot.
- After 12 to 14 weeks of chilling, it's time to trick your bulbs into behaving as if winter is over and spring has come. Your bulbs will most likely develop roots and bloom in about 8 more weeks.
- Plant your bulbs in a pot of soil, leaving their tips poking out of the soil. Or force them in water: Place a 3-inch layer of gravel in a bucket or comparable watertight container and add water until it barely reaches the surface of the stones. Set the hyacinth bulbs on top of the gravel with their bottoms just touching the water. Avoid immersing the bulbs in water because they will rot. Add a tablespoon of activated charcoal or a teaspoon of bleach to help keep the water fresh longer. Place the bucket or pot in a cool room out of direct sunlight. After several weeks, the bulbs will begin to show signs of growth that resemble little green noses. Add water as needed only to reach the developing roots.
- Move the bucket or pot into a warmer room with more light. Within a few more weeks, your bulbs will be ready for gentle transplanting into pretty arrangements. To use potted bulbs in arrangements, unpot them and gently tug their roots apart. Rinse any soil off the roots.





Shady Corner Takes Center Stage

A dim backyard gets its groove back in this quick-and-easy Garden Ideas makeover.

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY LUKE MILLER
PHOTOGRAPHERS: JAY WILDE AND MARTY BALDWIN

The secluded corner made the perfect stage: in back, a colorful house with a handsome stone foundation and ornamental porch railing; in front, bricks so full of character you could almost hear them whispering stories about where they've been. But a stage without stars isn't much of a draw.

A casting call was sounded. Out with the motley bunch of sun lovers so busy trying to survive in the shade that they rarely bloomed. In with a yeoman cast of characters more suited to the shadows cast by century-old oaks. The light



LEFT: The original bed was filled with mostly sun-loving plants that languished in the light shade. We beefed up the soil and substituted more appropriate plants.

Weekend
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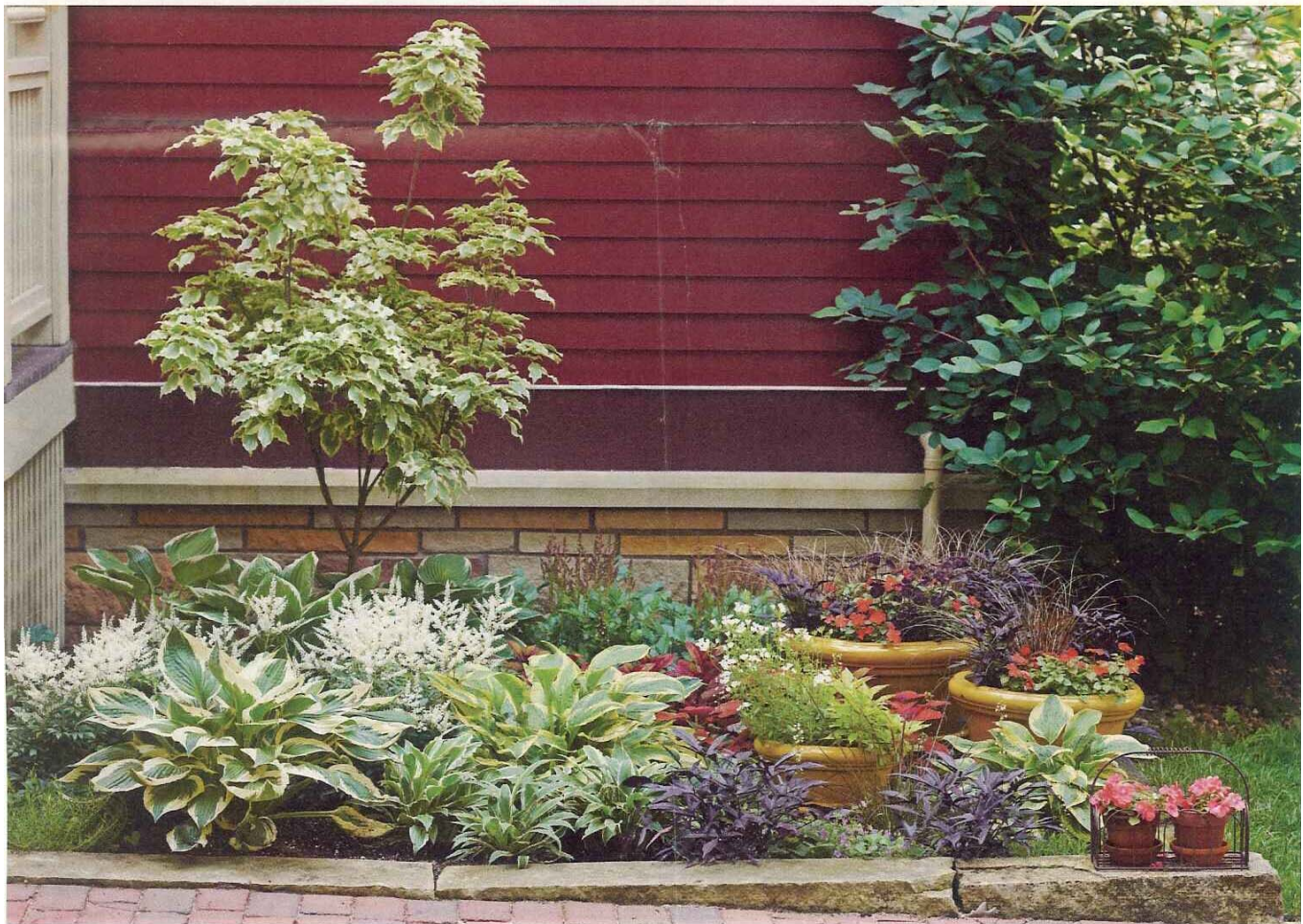
shade—the result of lower branches having been trimmed from the tall trees—made it possible to use a wider range of plants.

While lighting conditions play a big role in plant selection, soil quality is just as important. Most plants require good drainage (no standing water) and ample nutrients to thrive. Our site drained efficiently, but we amended the soil with a mixture of compost, peat moss, and composted cow manure to improve the texture and nutrient base. As a result, the plants in this shady bed grow faster and healthier, and they are less stressed, meaning they're also less susceptible to diseases and insects.

We laid out the bed according to plan, improvising by moving plants around until we found a setup we liked. Empty nursery pots marked where we would later add containers and filler plants. A mulch of cocoa bean shells dissuades weeds and gives the bed a finished look. Cocoa bean shells are lightweight, so they won't impede the growth of smaller, more delicate plants, but they can be poisonous to some animals, so pet owners should substitute shredded leaves or bark.

It wasn't a big production—taking about a weekend to accomplish—but our little shady rest stop seems to fit the bill perfectly.

OPPOSITE: Bronze tints of coleus play off orange impatiens and gold ceramic containers. BELOW: Flowers are secondary, thanks to a supporting cast of plants with variegated and colored foliage.



Weekend Makeover



PLANT LIST

- A *Cornus alba* 'Wolf Eyes' dogwood, Zones 5–8
- B *Astilbe* 'Visions', Zones 4–8
- C *Coleus* Colorblaze 'Royal Glissade', annual
- D *Coleus* Colorblaze 'Sedona', annual
- E *Heuchera* 'Frosted Violet' coralbells, Zones 4–9
- F *Hosta* 'Patriot', Zones 4–8
- G *Astilbe* × *arendsii* 'Deutschland', Zones 4–9
- H *Hosta* × 'Ginko Craig', Zones 3–8
- I *Hosta* × 'Twilight', Zones 3–8
- J *Ipomoea* 'Blackie' sweet potato vine, annual

Potted annuals:

- Carex Graceful Grasses Toffee Twist
- Burgundy coleus
- Orange impatiens
- Ipomoea* 'Blackie' sweet potato vine
- Ipomoea* 'Marguerite' sweet potato vine

Buy a shade bed like this: see p. 5
or visit readersshopping.com



Upright boxwood and large urns filled with Temari Patio Rose verbena and Surfinia Sky Blue petunias flank the entrance to the terrace seating area.

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PLANTING A CORNER BED



1 Remove existing plants. Compost or discard weeds; transplant keeper plants to other areas of the garden. If you can't plant the keepers immediately in a permanent location, put them in old nursery pots in a shady spot until you are ready to do so.



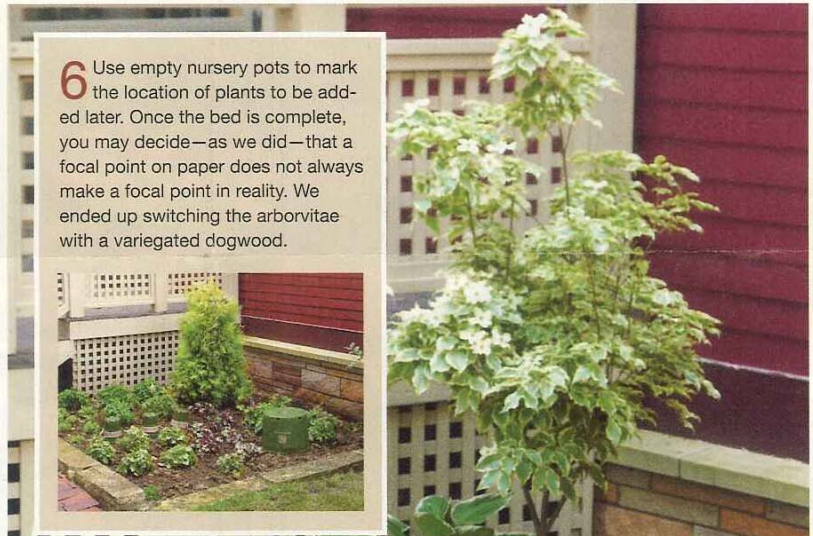
2 Amend the soil. We used bagged amendments including mushroom compost, composted cow manure, and peat moss. Dig the amendments into the soil and rake the bed smooth.



3 Place your potted plants wherever you wish. This is a good time to step back and look at what you are creating. Don't be afraid to move plants around. That's what we did after noticing some plants in our original design would be hidden from view.



4 Remove individual plants from nursery pots. If plants are rootbound (the fleshy roots will be prominent), use a root-pruning saw or serrated knife to slice through on four sides and on the bottom of the rootball. This will encourage roots to migrate into the bed, rather than continuing to twist around in a circle.



6 Use empty nursery pots to mark the location of plants to be added later. Once the bed is complete, you may decide—as we did—that a focal point on paper does not always make a focal point in reality. We ended up switching the arborvitae with a variegated dogwood.



5 Plant in a hole that is as deep but twice as wide as the rootball. Backfill and tamp gently to remove air pockets. Generally, it's best to start in the back and move toward the front of the bed. Plant larger specimens first, then add smaller companions.



PERENNIALS AND SHRUBS: MONROVIA GROWERS (MONROVIA.COM). **ANNUALS:** PROVEN WINNERS (PROVENWINNERS.COM). **SOIL AMENDMENTS:** FAFARD INC. (FAFARD.COM). **CONTAINERS:** CAMPANIA (CAMPANIAINTERNATIONAL.COM).

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