



# A Kentucky-Inspired Garden

Story and photos by Andrea Wilson Mueller

Community beautification reveals much about the communities we live in. Prior to the Equestrian Games in 2010, Frankfort (as you know, the capital of Kentucky), was preparing for the visitors by creating a task force for the beautification of the community in a multitude of ways, which would continue well beyond the games. A project we grabbed was a donated design and installation to welcome many visitors to our city and to the capitol building. A tired group of daylilies was in the flower bed, and it was time for a makeover. There was about a month of color and the remainder of the year left a bland entrance into the city.

As we planned for the highly visible entrance to downtown Frankfort and main gateway to the capitol, consideration of wow factor and easy maintenance were the two main goals. These are the goals for most landscapes – something that looks great with little care. The care would be the responsibility of the state's grounds employees since it was state property. So, like all publicly maintained designs, the design needed to be beautiful, but also very low maintenance and drought tolerant.

A Kentucky-inspired garden came to mind, which would include Kentucky plants and attract Kentucky wildlife. The tulip poplar tree is the

Kentucky state tree, the goldenrod is the Kentucky state flower, and the other plants would attract the state bird, the cardinal, and also provide nesting and shelter. By using mostly native material, the plants would be well suited for the site and conditions. With no nearby water, the plants selected also had to be drought tolerant.

A trio of 'Winter King' hawthorns were used to attract cardinals, dwarf viburnums and 'Karl Foerster' reed grass would provide nesting, and an eastern white pine, a Kentucky native, was added shelter for the birds. The 'Indian Summer' black-eyed Susan with its extra large, golden yellow



↑ The large flower of 'Indian Summer' black-eyed Susan is a real showstopper and easy to maintain and grow.

The interplanted 'White Swan' coneflower helps to provide depth to the 'Indian Summer' black-eyed Susan mass. →

**Facing page:** The entry to the capitol and downtown area provides year-round color and interest with a variety of mostly native perennials, grasses, shrubs and trees.

Tulip poplar in bloom. ↓







flower heads, and ‘White Swan’ coneflower with beautiful white drooping flowers, would also help to attract the cardinals.

A slightly raised mound in a circular shape was created in the middle for the state flower, goldenrod, where we used ‘Fireworks’, a variety known for its golden yellow flowers that arch gracefully downward “like glittering trails from an exploding skyrocket.” It is a late summer and early fall bloomer, which is essential for mixing with other late-blooming perennials, in this case, black-eyed Susan and coneflower. Since goldenrod tends to spread vigorously once established, usually in unwanted places, we also added a border of 12-inch flashing around it to keep goldenrod in the desired place. Russian sage was also added as a favorite, low-maintenance, drought-tolerant plant to soften and complement the bright hues of golden yellow. Lastly, a drift of daffodils were planted in the fall and will come up this April to welcome spring and add more spring beauty and seasonal interest to the design.

As for winter interest, by using mostly non-evergreen plant material

↑ **The scene when leaving the city – graceful reed grass, Russian sage, goldenrod ready to bloom and black-eyed Susan.**

**The plants are laid out and the center circle for the focal point, ‘Fireworks’ goldenrod, is raised and bordered with flashing to prevent unwanted spreading. →**

**Facing page: Russian sage softens the bright hues of ‘Indian Summer’ black-eyed Susan.**

we planned to keep everything up until March, with dried seed heads of Russian sage, dormant vertical reed grass and red berries of ‘Winter King’ hawthorn all showing off in the snow. In early spring, the entire perennial and grass part of the design can be mowed over or cut back with a string trimmer. It doesn’t get much easier than that.

No water being onsite (or anywhere near the site) created the main challenge in the care of the design. The challenge was to keep it alive during the first season and hot



summer that followed. Thankfully, many volunteers, state grounds people and our company were able to care for everything, and by the next season everything had filled in nicely, which is when the photos were taken.

The gift has served its purpose and will continue to do so for the community of Frankfort and all of our visitors. ♡

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