



Boasting an incredible spread of late-season plants and flowers, this South End garden teems with texture and colour

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PHOTOS BY: MARGO ELLEN GESSER

Fall splendour garden

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Aster, dahlia and morning glory.
Below: Jerusalem artichoke.
This tall yellow perennial
produces dense potato-like
roots that you can eat.





Halifax resident and artist Hallie Watson describes her expansive garden as a "giant living sculpture" with layers of colour, fragrance and texture that change with the seasons.

For Hallie Watson, gardening really starts to get interesting once the cooler weather arrives. "Most people don't know about gardens," says the gardener. "They think it all ends come fall. But there are all kinds of things that go off in the fall that people don't realize."

Tucked in behind her arts and crafts home, a corner property in Halifax's South End, Watson's lush garden spreads over the entire back end of her property, covering a swath 30 metres long and nine metres wide. "The trouble with this garden is that people won't cross the lawn to visit it," Watson laughs. "You get rewarded when you do."

She has been gardening here for 20 years, continuing the passion that started with her family back in Ontario. "My parents both gardened," she says. "My dad even built a greenhouse. Now, I grow my own seeds in my basement. It's way too expensive to buy plants."

Each year, she starts a number of annuals from seed, including alyssum, begonia, cosmos, coleus, dusty miller, marigold, nicotiana and ageratum. "Seed growing is just a thrill," she says. "When you see them start coming up in the winter, it's a miracle. As long as you dead-head, feed and water them, annuals keep on making flowers because their modus operandi is to make seeds. They fill a spot for the whole season."

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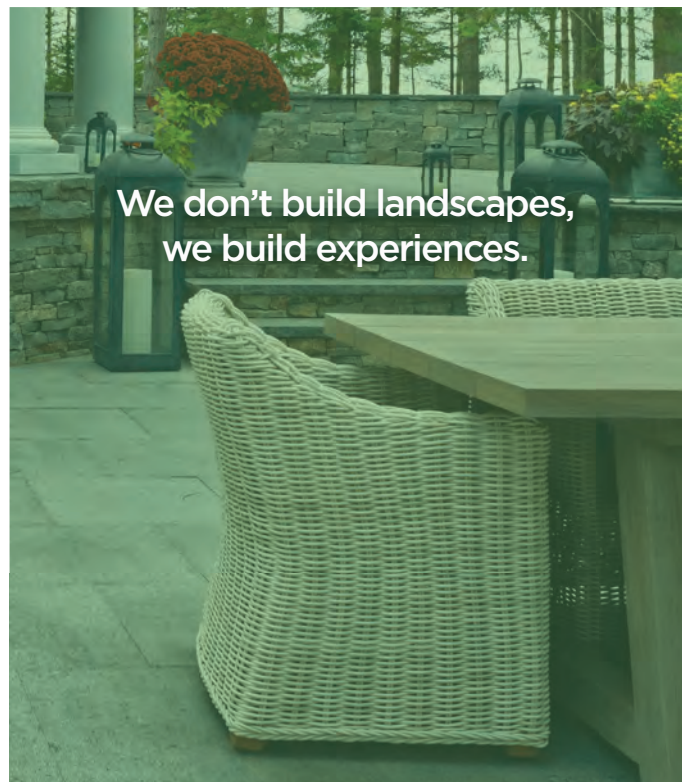
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Come fall, Hallie Watson's backyard garden is filled with late-season blooms like dahlias, asters, golden rod and Joe Pye weed. Her husband Ron built the four-metre tall arbour in the space, which has survived many hurricanes and blizzards over the years.

Her fall garden boasts an impressive display of dahlias, some the size of dinner plates. "They're fabulous," says Watson. "As long as you dead-head the flowers, they look pretty darn good. They like the cool weather."

The space is replete with pink and purple asters, sneezeweed, helenium, marigolds, chrysanthemums, echinacea and cosmos.

Roses, the showy staples of her summer garden, keep blooming until first frost. "They don't mind cold weather, they just like to be watered and cool." She favours the fragrant Shakespeare roses, a velvety crimson variety developed by British rose breeder David Austin. "What's the point of a rose if it doesn't smell nice?" she says.

Other favourites are Canadian explorer roses. "They were developed from wild roses, so they are resilient and require less care," she says. "They are named after Canadian explorers. I like the Champlain, which is red."

Watson loves bringing blue flowers into the mix. "In gardening, blue is a colour that is revered," she says. Blue ageratum and the perennial lobelia

are favourites. "The lobelia self-seeds all over the place," she adds. "It's a fairly polite plant, so you can pull it out easily if you want to."

To keep the bees happy, the fall garden has swaths of golden rod, Joe Pye weed, globe thistle and fragrant acidanthera. "I like the smelly things," Watson laughs. "If I'm attracted to it, I'll plant it."

In the centre of the garden is a courtyard area with a table and chairs. "We call it the dining room," she says, gesturing to the high walls of Joe Pye weed, asters and mallow that carve out the space. "One wall of the dining room was covered with morning glory last year. They make me think of my dad. He grew them up the telephone pole of our house in Toronto; it was just covered in blue."

Watson's husband Ron built the four-metre tall arbour, which has weathered hurricanes, tropical storms and blizzards over the years. It's covered in climbing rose, wisteria and an elegant tangutica clematis that has yellow lantern blooms.

Near the driveway, a massive burning bush turns bright red come September. "It's probably 45 years old," Watson says. "It's in a wonderful

GARDENING

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:
Zinnia, dahlia and rose.



layered shape and I've never had to trim it. It has these teeny tiny orange berries."

An accomplished artist, Watson is often painting in her home studio when she's not working in the garden. Inside her house, she displays her massive oil paintings of trees. (The trees of Point Pleasant Park in Halifax inspired her last exhibition).

For her, gardening is a lot like creating art. "My garden is like a giant living sculpture," she says, noting the layers of flowers and plants in varying colours, textures and heights.

Beyond its creative outlet, having a garden full of blooms well into fall helps Watson abate thoughts of the impending winter. "I try not to think about it coming," she says. "I enjoy being in nature with the plants. I feel part of a bigger natural whole. I'm never happier than when I'm digging." ❀



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