



# Contrasting COURTYARD

**The overgrown yard and post construction site left little to be desired.** Ivy and euonymus battled it out with one another up the mature trees and over the ground. Existing drainage issues, poor soil and the construction scars from remodeling were in dire need of creative solutions. On the plus side, there were many mature trees anxiously waiting to provide shade and character to the space. A formal, Tuscan-ish courtyard with a surrounding contrasting woodland was conceptualized and so the project began ...

The backyard transformation from remodel construction site to courtyard began with the removal of the ivy and euonymus, the leggy shrubs and all dead branches from the trees. The homeowners sought a lower-maintenance garden after fighting the invasive ground covers for years. But

more than anything, they wanted an inviting entertaining and “chillaxin” space as Lynn, the homeowner, writes on her blog about her new garden ([hesitant-gardener.blogspot.com](http://hesitant-gardener.blogspot.com)).

In completing the design, the soil (or lack thereof) was also a great challenge. Poor soil is standard for many jobs, especially new construction, but this particular older neighborhood sits on solid rock and clay with poor drainage. The soil for the holly and juniper required special preparation and all other plants were chosen to work with the native soil. As with any landscaping, you design around what you are given and choose plants that are able to withstand such conditions – in this case being mostly native or native improved varieties, these plants work.



△ Before – the tired backyard.

**Above:** The original plan called for leaving 6 feet of the center circle open for planting, but the homeowner opted for a circular patio. The ‘Sky Pencil’ holly and ‘Sky Rocket’ juniper provide the “walls” to this courtyard space.



An existing curved brick wall had to be worked into the design, which provided a challenge to the layout at first. Then inspiration came from the least likely of places. There was a large bare wall in the space, which needed something. I stumbled across a large, heavy (over 900-pound) cast-stone fountain and just knew it was what I had been looking for. The fountain would, of course, add a tranquil water sound to the space, but the shape and curves of the fountain were a source of inspiration for the entire patio layout.

The formal shape and rounded top of the fountain provided the idea for the formal circle details in the pavers, which provide interest on a symmetrical axis for the entire lower patio. To complete the formal pattern of the circles and craft the courtyard feel, the 8-foot (at installation) columnar 'Sky Rocket' junipers were used as the backdrop in a semicircular pattern with a row of 'Sky Pencil' holly in the lower layer. Both of these very vertical plants created the walls of this space, and subsequently much needed privacy. Be-

△ 'Sky Pencil' holly were placed to eventually fill in and create a room effect as well an element of surprise to garden visitors. Pachysandra and 'Fox Red' sedge fill in the surrounding space.

**The seating area fits perfectly within the circle pavers and provides a nice entertaining space with the sound of water in the fountain in the background.**▽





This rock placement allows the water to flow gracefully to the rain garden, which was created to capture runoff from the patio as well as the gutters. Pictured are 'Fanal' astilbe, several hosta varieties and lady fern.



◁ The inspirational fountain is surrounded by soft lady fern and two cast-stone containers in the same finish planted with annuals.

△ The plan view of the design shows how the existing wall (left) was incorporated to the overall design. As with any plan, modifications were made before construction per the homeowners' requests. For example, a sitting wall was removed from the design and the circle with plants was completed in pavers instead of green space.

fore the garden was installed the homeowners had little privacy since their backyard view was directly into their neighbor's kitchen and garage.

Beyond the formality and symmetry of the patio is the stark contrast of woodland area with magnificent mature trees. In the woodland garden, the homeowners' existing plants were recycled and transplanted, and also combined with several fothergilla, oakleaf hydrangea, orna-

mental grass, redbird dogwood, astilbe, lady and cinnamon ferns, and hosta varieties. Among these plantings is also a rain garden full of *Equisetum* and Siberian iris that capture water runoff from the patio as well as water from the new addition.

There are several relaxing "rooms" in the garden, including the hammock and additional sitting area among the woodland garden, and the large patio area with harmonizing circular furniture. And of

course, it's much easier to relax and entertain when the homeowners are surrounded by a beautiful, easy to maintain garden, which is their pride and joy.🌿

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