

STATE-BY-STATE  
GARDENING

# KENTUCKY GARDENER



KENTUCKY'S OWN GUIDE TO GREAT GARDENING & LANDSCAPING

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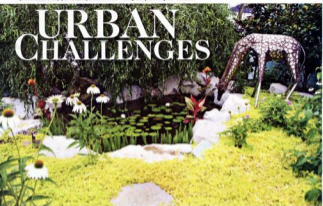
WITCH HAZEL BRINGS BRIGHT  
BLOOMS TO A DRAB WINTER

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NATIVES  
in the FORMAL  
GARDEN

# URBAN CHALLENGES



## Everyone loves a good challenge,

especially me. Being a garden designer both in Kentucky and in New York City for 22 years now, I love going to potential projects and seeing lots of problems that I can hopefully solve with a good landscape design. To me, it not only validates what I do for a living, but it also helps with my “hero complex,” always trying to save the day.

Occasionally, these problems even stump me. Take for example, my client of many years, Nancy Barton. Her first project was easy: A townhouse, traditional on the outside with a small courtyard in the back where she fed and watched migrating birds from inside all through the seasons. But the interior was anything but traditional. Nancy’s eclectic tastes, including her artwork and furniture all in a carefully chosen color palette of pastels, made for an interesting journey as one walked through her townhouse. Her collection wasn’t static — it came right out and “grabbed” you — lots of fun.

But when one of Nancy’s investment properties, which had been a popular downtown restaurant for over a decade, suddenly went out of business, she got the idea of moving into this space and having her office next door in the same building. So how do you transform a restaurant (which had previously been a tiny store since the 40s) surrounded by an asphalt parking lot into a livable space? The interior was large rooms and tall ceilings that created a perfect, almost gallerylike, feeling for her art collection. Being a responsible steward of the earth, Nancy tried to incorporate as much sustainable and recycled materials into the remodel job as possible. The wood floors and kitchen counters were reclaimed fencing and barn wood from a defunct horse farm nearby. An actual stable door was used as a privacy door. Geothermal heating, solar panels and collecting rainwater further continued the “green” theme.

▲ A stainless steel giraffe “drinks” from the water garden surrounded by creeping Jenny.

However, the outside was a different set of issues. Totally walled on all four sides by parking lot, it was anything but attractive to birds. As you walked to the front door, the view of the next door neighbor’s parking lot was the main attraction. Remember, this was a restaurant and both neighbors were also businesses. Safety was an issue as well, so something had to be done to provide protection from people off the street. Perhaps the most challenging of all was figuring out how to work with a large, rectangular building painted in two-tone aqua, one of Nancy’s favorite colors. Again, this was not the typical home and the landscape needed to be something special as well. Here’s how we dealt with the problems while creating a visually attractive landscape that worked with the building as well as Nancy’s aesthetic and love of nature.

**PROBLEM** 1,000,000 HR, CHARLESTON, SC  
**PROTECTION FROM THE STREET**

We had to use an 8-foot chain-link fence (yikes!) to surround the residential area, so negotiating. To lessen the impact of an ugly protection feature, the fence was set back 15 feet from the sidewalks and planted densely in front of it. A trimmed 9-foot Oak Leaf holly hedge bordering the sidewalk is beautiful all year long while the plantings of redwing dogwoods between the hedge and the fence changes with each season. Bright red branches tipped with white berries are the main event in the winter and fresh green leaves come on in the spring and last until they turn a golden color in the fall. With these plantings, along with choosing a black chain-link and growing several types of clematis, nobody can even see that there is a fence around the "house."



The chain-link fence installed for security will not remain an eyesore for long. The dense winter feature – soon to be home for many neighborhood birds – is well on its way to being completed.

Just five months after the garden left the parking lot and neighboring houses are camouflaged naturally. Blue Arbutus clematis frame the view while Holly hedges makes a dense screen. Creeping Jenny was selected as the ground cover for its vivid color and durability, while both Clematis and white coneflower were the perfect choice to attract bees and butterflies.



## LANDSCAPE DESIGN

### CHALLENGE #2: CREATE AN ENTRANCE TO THE RESIDENTIAL PART

A concrete block courtyard was built for further privacy from the street. Recycled handrails were placed on top of the courtyard walls to both make a statement and provide even more protection. As with most everything throughout the project, Nancy's style shows through, this time painting only one of the handrails red while the others were all black. It stands out as much as the contemporary building does in the traditional city of Lexington, Kentucky.

There still was the problem of seeing the next door parking lot as you entered the courtyard and came to the front door. The best way to take a bad view away is to block it, but another way of dealing with it is to put something amazing in front of it and your eye only sees the beauty. We decided to do the latter and built a small natural pond with waterfall to attract the birds and other wildlife. *Scenes from Nancy*

had collected over the years were used to edge the pond as well as to line the bottom. To create a screen behind the pond, curly willow branches were stuck in the soil in the spring and by midsummer, they had taken root and completely blocked the neighbor's parking lot. Both diversions became centers of attention in their own right.

The old sign from the previous restaurant was placed on its side and a liner added to create a self-contained water feature. ☺

Whimsical plants, rain barrel and art objects were chosen to complement the less-than-traditional unusual aqua exterior color. ☺



### CHALLENGE #3: HOW TO CREATE A COURTYARD THAT LOOKS GREAT ALL YEAR LONG

From the kitchen and great room, floor-to-ceiling glass allows people to look out into a back courtyard 365 days a year. This can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on how the space is designed. But from working 22 years in New York City on penthouse gardens, I have learned that the client demands beauty every day of the year when they look out on it from morning till night ... so, the same thing had to be done here.

First order of business was to create the centerpiece that everything else revolves around. Since Nancy loves birds and birds love water, we decided on a water feature that had to be freestanding and self-contained to sit on the concrete floor. (An outlet had been placed in the middle of the space but no water, hence a self-contained water feature.) Again, working with the recycling idea in mind, we sort of tripped over the new water feature, literally. The old metal sign for the tire store was being thrown away in a pile to be picked up by the

garbage people. The sturdy frame was placed on its side, lined with rubber liner, covered with leftover stainless steel and capped off with leftover pieces of the kitchen counter granite. To go even further with the recycling idea, tumbled colored glass was placed on the bottom of the "pond" and two recycled metal birds were placed inside as art. In a sense, the whole center of attention in the garden was made from what most people would have thrown away.

A series of containers at strategic points added the much needed "green" to the blank canvas of concrete floor and wooden walls. Black pines, blue Atlas cedars and China Girl hollies became the "bones" of the garden because of the evergreen qualities that remained the same all year. Seasonal annuals are planted below the trees and shrubs for more interest. Birdbaths and feeders that are also works of art help bring in the birds, along with the bubbling water from the "pond." Each tree has a bird's nest, which provides lots of entertainment for Nancy and her cats who watch the whole show that unfolds each day.

For seating, several modern rocking chairs offer a chance to enjoy the outdoors while a table and four chairs makes an outdoor dining area. To the delight of visitors, the table is actually an old, round water trough from the farm supply, lined with soil and moss and filled with orchids and ferns. A thick glass top is placed on the tank, creating a living "terrarium" for the diners to enjoy while they eat.

In essence, what was formerly a place of business with ample parking became a home, not only for Nancy and her cats, but for the migrating birds that she feeds most of the year. The same aesthetic indoors was taken to the outdoor spaces, seamlessly connecting the two. Recycling and repurposing was the theme of the project, and to paraphrase Nancy, "After living here for several years now, I look outside everyday and wonder what I did to deserve this ..." Now that is what I call mission accomplished! 🐾

*Jon Carlottis has been building roof gardens in NYC for over 22 years, and now spends half his time in his home state of Kentucky creating urban and country gardens. His family's store, Rockcastle River Trading Co., is located on their beautiful property along the Rockcastle River, and the gardens are open to the public every day except Sunday. For more information on all of Jon's projects, go to [www.joncarloftis.com](http://www.joncarloftis.com).*



△ This old water trough turned dining table houses moss, ferns and orchids.



◁ A stainless steel giraffe sculpture "munches" the porcelain vine growing up the recycled handrails rising from the front cinder block wall.