

An aerial photograph of a garden. On the left is a large, well-maintained green lawn. A stone-paved path winds through the garden, bordered by various plants and shrubs. In the foreground, there are dark purple plants and several potted plants on a wooden deck. The word "Maple" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the center of the image.

Maple



Paradise

Creating Year-Round Drama in a Bonney Lake Backyard

Master gardener and certified horticulturist Irene Mills has a knack for gardening and turning the simple into the spectacular. The proof is in her Bonney Lake backyard. Dotted with friendly, golden-edged, fiery orange maples and robust native cedars, her backyard delights and entertains the eye. Looking at it now, it's hard to believe that just two years ago all this color, drama and beauty were nonexistent. "In 2006, when we moved in, I went around the yard and asked myself, 'What would go best here?'" Mills recalls. >>

BY CHRISTY PESSEMIER
PHOTOS BY TOM OWEN



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<< It didn't take long to begin the digging and artful arranging. She picked plants appropriate to her naturally cooler micro climate garden and had a deck built so she could grow tomatoes and house terra-cotta herb pots. A friend built the warm clay-colored patio Mills designed. And, to grace the back left corner of the yard, a gazebo was added for her husband, Bob, to lounge in his hammock.

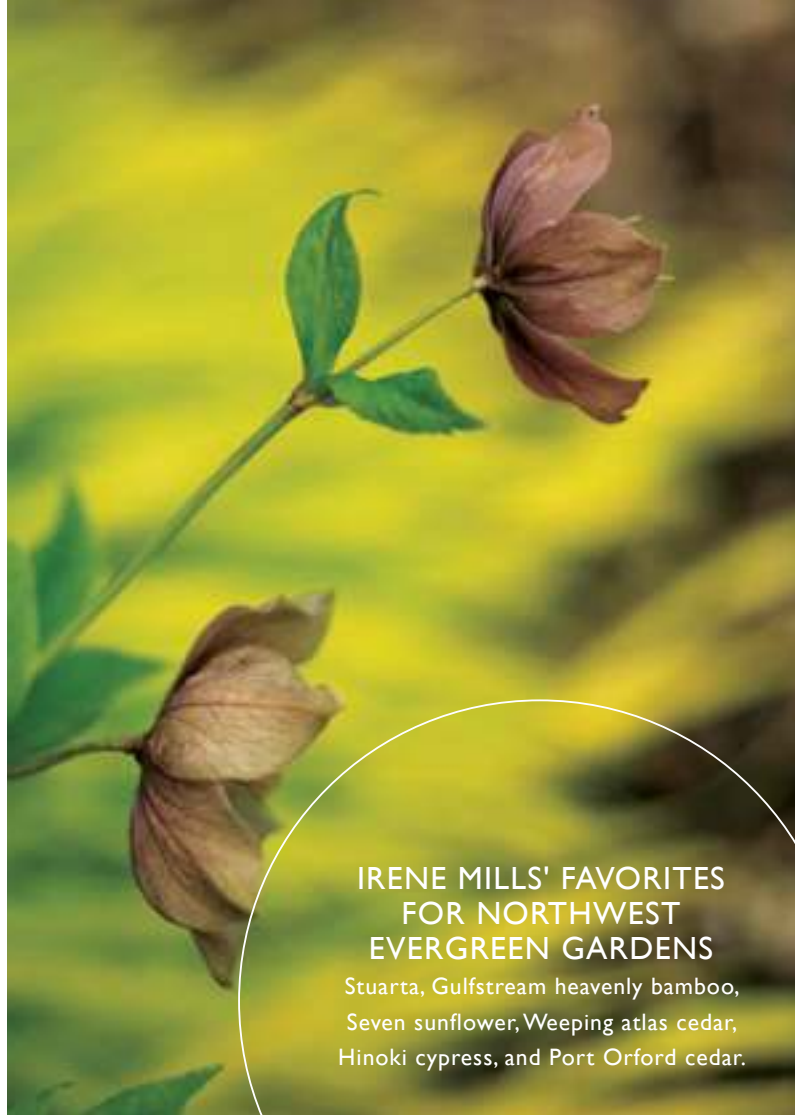
With a bounce in her step and distinct sense of accomplishment, Mills introduces each plant. Reciting scientific plant names and origins, she reveals the passion of her profession.

"This is one of my favorites," she says, reaching a hand out to touch the red tinged leaves of a Gulfstream heavenly bamboo. "It's not really bamboo. It's an evergreen, and it can go from full sun to part shade," Mills said with a smile. "It's the

little black dress of plants. You can never have too many."

Mills points to the many maple trees scattered throughout her yard. There are three Vine maples, two red Japanese maples, a Japanese katsura maple, a laceleaf maple and a snakebark maple. Among the maples, Mills has thoughtfully added bergenia, hardy cyclamen, black mondo grass and a variety of cedars and dwarf conifers.

She describes her garden as a maple garden mixed with native Northwest plants. Her goal is to experience year-round beauty and color, and to keep things as low maintenance as possible. "In the past, I was always re-arranging my plants," Mills says. "Now, I do it differently. I figure where each plant will thrive and look best, and I don't need to rearrange things. I'm happy with a simpler approach." >>



IRENE MILLS' FAVORITES
FOR NORTHWEST
EVERGREEN GARDENS

Stuarta, Gulfstream heavenly bamboo,
Seven sunflower, Weeping atlas cedar,
Hinoki cypress, and Port Orford cedar.





<< Mills enjoys the look and feel of the hillside, which butts up to her patio and garden bed. Bushy, native ferns, leggy alders and wild huckleberry were there to welcome her when she moved in. Instead of imposing on the space with her own agenda, Mills is happy to embrace it.

As if to thank her for her hospitality, a native Douglas squirrel appears from the backyard brush and swiftly races to the bird feeder hanging from the gazebo. Delighted with Mills' fresh supply of black oil sunflowers seeds, it looks up for a split second just before dashing away with its newfound delicacy.

Gently gurgling and filling the backyard air with sounds of peace and serenity, an unassuming, moss-covered, log waterfall spills out into a hollowed-out square stone. Mills received the stone from her husband as an anniversary gift. "I tell people that I got a rock for my anniversary present and it's in my backyard water fountain."

Along the side yard of her garden, Mills has made the best use of the allowed space. A bushy, green masterwork with vibrant green leaves gestures to the many ferns, hostas and a special shrub known as azarra, which originates from Chile. Its shiny, vibrant branches reach out into the walkway toward the front entrance of the home.

Mills looks forward to the changes of each season and their reflection in the many evergreen plants she has chosen for her yard. "Even in winter, this garden has quite a bit to see," she says. 📍

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WHERE SHE SHOPS

- **Watson's Greenhouse**
6211 Pioneer Way E., Puyallup
253.845.7359
- **Alpine Nursery & Landscaping**
17518 79th Ave. E., Puyallup
253.847.7078
- **Vassey Nursery**
2424 Tacoma Road E., Puyallup
253.841.3550
- **Lazy-S-Nursery**
37050 28th Ave. S. Federal Way
253.838.8041
- **Jungle Fever Exotics**
5050 N. Pearl St., Ruston
253.759.1669
- **McLendon Hardware's Nursery**
1111 Fryar Ave., Sumner
253.863.2264



NEED HELP?
Irene Mills offers private consultations and garden coaching. You can reach her at theplantmommy.com.

