



houzz



A New England Front Yard Designed for Relaxation and Resilience

Bluestone paving, raised beds and ornamental plantings transform a compact yard near Boston.

By Annie Thornton, Houzz Editorial Staff SEPTEMBER 24, 2018

The allure of sitting outside, enjoying the sun's glow and drinking a cup of coffee inspired the owners of this home near Boston to make over their compact front yard, the property's only sunny spot. The yard as it stood didn't reflect the style of the home's updated interiors, and its lack of seating or privacy meant the homeowners used it as little more than a thoroughfare.

"They wanted something that looked a little crisper, neater and more welcoming," says landscape designer Andrea Nilsen Morse, who was hired to transform the front yard. "They wanted a barrier between them and the street, but they didn't want a fence."

Yard at a Glance

Who lives here: A couple with two kids. (The wife's parents live a couple of houses down and are over often, Morse says.)

Location: Brookline, part of greater Boston

Size: About 950 square feet (89 square meters), including the side yard.

Designer: Andrea Nilsen Morse



In redesigning the front yard, Morse emphasized clean lines, multipurpose elements and resilient, attractive materials to create a front yard area that better suited the clients' functional and aesthetic needs.

She lined the front of the property with two new built-in planters, creating the privacy and feeling of enclosure the homeowners wanted, without cutting them off from the sidewalk. "In the summertime the plants give them more screening. In the winter there is structure but more visibility," she says.





When selecting the planters' contents, Morse considered function, aesthetics and winter resiliency — especially important in Boston. “I try to stick with herbaceous perennials that can get slammed with snow and come back,” Morse says. “I didn’t want a lot of woody plants — things that would break or get crushed.”

She filled the planters with reblooming hydrangeas, asters, geraniums and grasses, sticking with a mostly green, white and purple planting palette to complement the surrounding exterior colors. The plants will offer good seasonal interest throughout the year, die back over winter and return again in spring.

Morse also planted the parking strip between the sidewalk and the road. “We put in drought-tolerant, salt-tolerant perennials,” she says, including ‘Evergold’ sedge (*Carex oshimensis* ‘Evergold’, USDA zones 5 to 9; find your zone) and ‘Lidakense’ stonecrop (*Sedum caudicicola* ‘Lidakense’, zones 4 to 9). Stones from the backyard add some texture and height.

A decorative metal panel from Parasoleil hangs on the wall next to the front door, picking up the door’s color and adding interest to the blank surface. An understated, backless bench underneath provides seating and allows the panel to stand out.

Thermal bluestone, which has been heat treated to create a smooth, consistent surface, paves the new entry terrace. “It’s a common hardscape material to use here,” Morse says, in part because it can withstand Boston’s cold winters. Its clean finish fits with the crisp, updated style the homeowners wanted. Bluestone veneer also covers the concrete core planter walls.





PHOTO BY ROSEMARY FLETCHER
PATIO FURNITURE: KINGSLEY BATE

Connecting elements that sat on different fixed elevations challenged Morse but also helped guide decisions and shape the design. For example, a path from the sidewalk needed to climb a couple of feet to reach the front door. “That main pathway left us with two planters on each side,” Morse says. A path from the driveway crosses the main path and steps down to meet the side yard, forming a new sunken patio behind one of the bluestone planters.

A teak table and pair of chairs round out the patio, providing the homeowners with their spot to relax and drink coffee. Morse selected the material for its durability and chose a folding set that would be easy to store over winter. “We didn’t want to store a lot of cushions,” she says, so she chose a style with a sling seat.



PHOTO BY ROSEMARY FLETCHER



PHOTO BY ROSEMARY FLETCHER
RAISED BEDS: NATURAL YARDS

Herbs and vegetables, including peppers, purslane and other varieties selected by the homeowner's mother, grow in three new cedar planters off the patio. "Her mom is an avid vegetable gardener," Morse says.

Morse arranged the prefab raised beds in a line alongside the house, screening the side yard from the adjacent neighbor's driveway. To create even more of a barrier — and more growing surface — Morse installed trellises along the outer edges of the planters.



PHOTO BY ROSEMARY FLETCHER

Landscape lighting on the planter wall softly illuminates the patio, allowing the homeowners to enjoy their outdoor space after the sun goes down. The same lights provide visibility on the outdoor steps.

PHOTO BY ROSEMARY FLETCHER



Before: The front yard before the renovation was typical. It featured a small patch of lawn on either side of a concrete paver walkway and a smattering of shrubs around the home's foundation. The design, though usable, did nothing to enhance the architecture or the homeowners' lifestyle.

Designer Tips

Morse offers advice for anyone looking to make the most of a front yard, big or small.

Add a patio. Lawn may be the classic front yard ground cover, but hardscape is versatile, easy to maintain and thrives in any lighting condition.

Think multipurpose. Design features that can serve more than one purpose are useful in all outdoor spaces and are especially helpful in small yards, where it's not always possible to fit in everything you want. In this garden, for example, the planters not only grow plants, they also function as screens, seats and outdoor walls for lights.