



Easygoing sedums grow in many regions; these Zone 8 gardens include the gray-blue Sedum spathulifolium 'Cape Blanco' and an unidentified yellow-flowered variety.

Tweaking tradition

Live in a ranch
but not a
modern marvel?
We have
just the landscaping
ideas to get you going ...

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photography SHWA

Post WWII, there was a lot of interest in exotics—blue cocktails and flaming appetizers,” says landscape architect Sam Williamson. The same went for plants: “When you think of phormium and other sculptural, crazy-looking plants—ocotillos and big, blue aloes—they were very popular. There was also an emphasis on minimalism—swathes of groundcovers like pachysandra and lawns—that you saw as well. Low maintenance was a big thing then, too.”

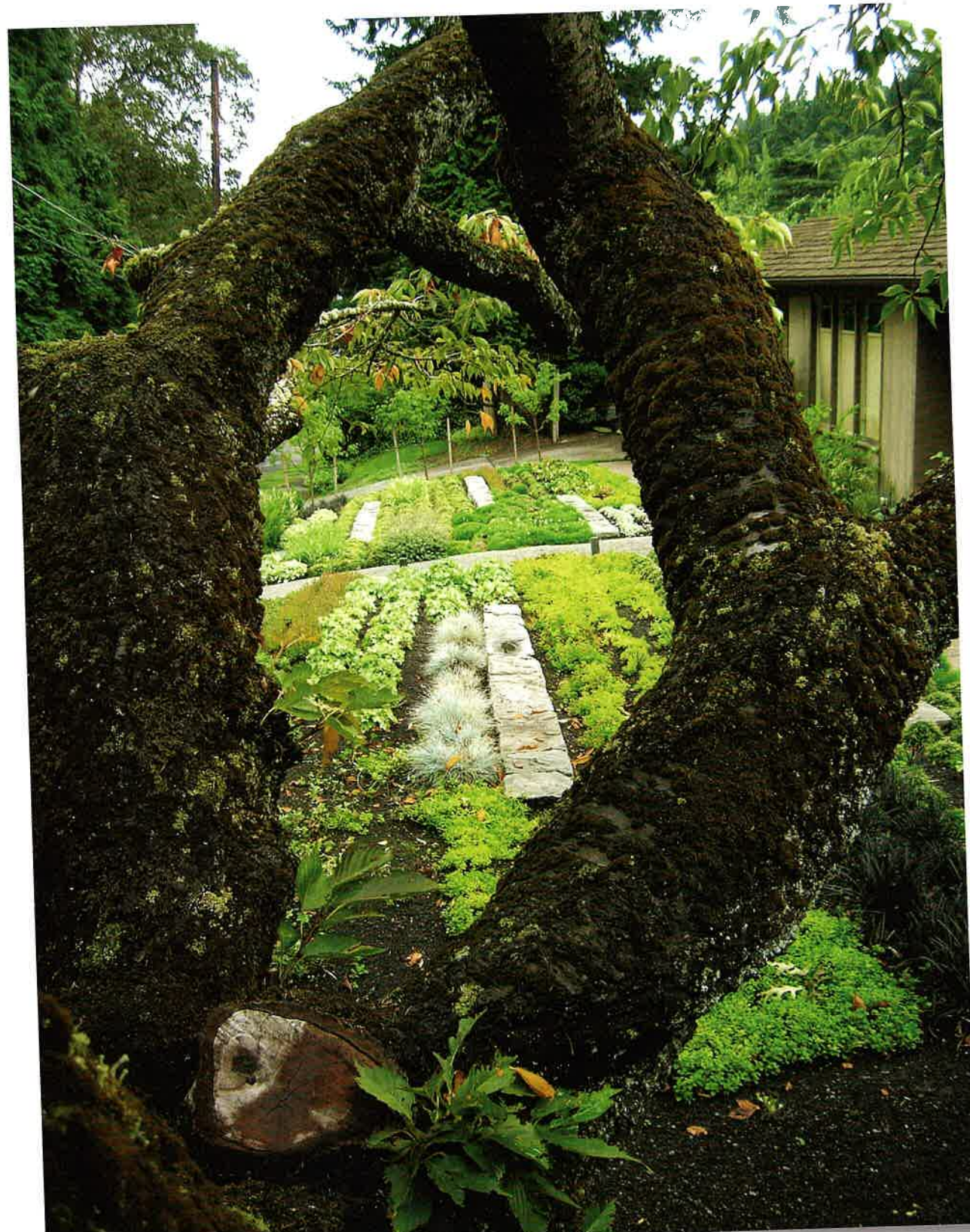
While the Phoenix look—succulents, palms and gravel—is graphically arresting, if you live in a less arid climate you may want a different approach. These three homes are sure to inspire: They’re all in USDA zone 8a (no colder than 10°–15°F typically) and were designed by Williamson’s firm, Samuel H. Williamson Associates in Portland, Ore.

“Some gardens for modern ranch houses extend the minimalist discipline out into the landscape; others are successfully set into a contrasting ‘jungle,’ ” he explains. “Le Corbusier would put his buildings into the wilderness; it’s almost a deliberate contrast with what’s going on in the house, and the contrast adds interest. The plants in these examples fit into one or the other type of garden, sometimes both.”

Seasonal Changes, Quilty Pleasures

The front yard in this first project was mostly lawn and shrubs past their prime. Homeowners Ed and Meg Okies wanted to address the boundary between public and private space and have a yard stylistically suited to their open-plan ranch. SHWA designed parallel bands of mounding groundcovers interspersed with basalt rock columns that form a textured tapestry—particularly appropriate since Meg is a clothing designer.

Williamson terms the design 'orthogonal'—a grid of aligned



rectangles with no curves in this interpretation. Although his firm conceived the project, the homeowners and another contractor selected and installed the plants. Some, such as the Dwarf mondo grass, are naturally clumping; others have become more blurred since the installation.

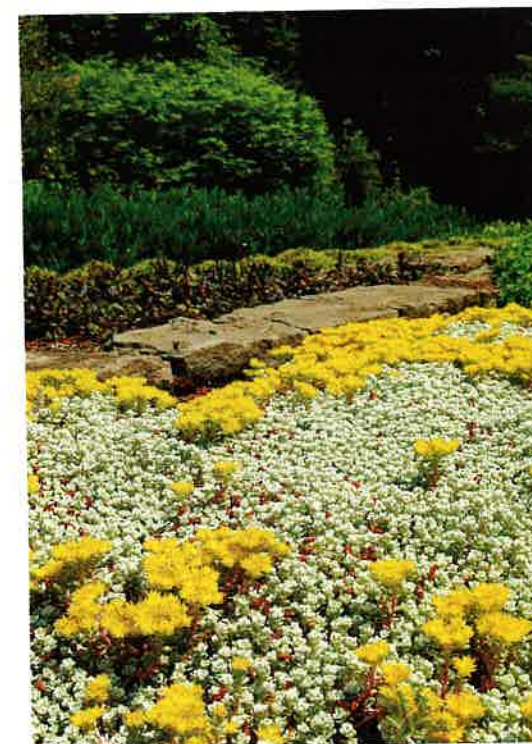
"Plants were selected that would grow to fill their allotted rectangle but not take over; the homeowners didn't want to battle their landscape for the next 30 years," he says. "There's a definite dot-dot-dot or eggs-in-a-carton quality to some of the plantings, while others have knitted together more. There are textural variations between the pieces of the quilt."

A path of aggregate concrete pavers leading to the front door and the side yard looks very midcentury, and the foundation beds under the eaves hold low-care shrubs and perennials with year-round textural interest. A grand old cherry tree was retained on the far side of the property, and three Paperbark maples and an existing tall cedar balance it near the driveway.

"One of the challenges of a house with wide eaves is that the areas underneath don't get any rainfall," Williamson mentions. "I couldn't do a groundcover, so we did bigger shrubs that could be situated just outside the eaves. That way, the root systems get water and the plant can fill in the area; another option is gravel or rocks." Plants in these foundation beds include hellebore, lily of the valley, penstemon and fetterbush, punctuated by several eave-high Hinoki false cypresses.



Foundation plants include **8** hellebore and **9** lily of the valley.



Opposite: The view through the cherry tree, shot when plants were a bit younger, shows the plot design most clearly. An original center walkway from the street was augmented with one running parallel to the house (see plan page 48). Fescue grass (*Festuca* 'Elijah Blue'), in the center of the frame, adds a nice counterpoint to the greens of the other groundcovers.



"We were interested in plants that had seasonal changes, while the basalt rock, the natural stone from this area, is unchanging," says landscape architect Sam Williamson. Groundcover plants include **1** bergenia (palm-sized round green leaves with seasonal pink flowers), then a row of **2** germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys* 'Nana'), which has spikes of small purple flowers. To the right of the first band of basalt are tight clumps of **3** dwarf mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Nanus') and a smaller row of **4** lilyturf (*Liriope muscari* 'Majestic'). In the foreground is **5** black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens') and next to it, **6** coral bells (*Heuchera* 'Mint Frost'). Near the front door and the clump of bamboo in the background are looser drifts of **7** yellow-flowering sedum, seen in detail, left.

Long and Low and Young and Lovely

The Lozanos, who Williamson describes as young designers for Nike, updated their ranch and wanted a front yard that was in keeping. Starting with a post-construction blank slate, they knew they needed an organized plan of entry and wanted interesting views from the rooms inside. They already had a large, somewhat high-maintenance back yard with a pool, so minimal effort was at the top of their list for the expansive front plot.

Williamson calls their new plan a twist on the 1950s suburban front yard, traditionally dominated by lawn and foundation plantings. "This is a second take on midcentury modernism, and begins with the knowledge of what that landscape would be, but then doesn't adhere to it," he says.

"One thing I like to do with modern homes is to set up a very

clear, disciplined structure that relates to and extends the spaces of the house, then place within that looser garden areas, like wild horses in a corral."

Geometric concrete pavers lead visitors from the curb or the driveway to a circular landing marking the front door. Four Birch-bark cherries with copper-colored trunks were planted at the corners of the entry hardscape, and groupings of River birches were added farther out in the yard. The disciplined rectangles of lawn and Creeping raspberry groundcover are broken up by looser sweeps of spirea, ornamental grasses and tall, layered perennials. There's even annual color in the form of daylilies, echinacea and coreopsis, and some stalwart Northwest standards like Mexican orange, heavenly bamboo, specimen pines and other evergreens are used as accents.

"Low maintenance means you can't have a huge variety of plant material," Williamson says. "Our way of handling that was to make aggressive sweeps of single species, which tend to make the design cohesive and also keep weeds out. To guard from being too boring, we made an overlay of sculptural plants over that."



Top: The view across the front yard shows that the "wild horse" elements still fit within an overall design discipline, even as they work to keep the plan from looking too buttoned-down.

Left: The fading blooms of a drift of spirea surround three River birches (*Betula nigra* 'Heritage') that steal the show with their dramatic peeling bark.

Below: From lawn to groundcover to layered herbaceous perennials—daisy-like **1** echinacea just coming into bloom and a clump of **2** Zebra grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus')—backed by a **3** birch on the right, red and green Japanese maples (center), and evergreens in the distance, this remote corner of the garden works as a nice screen for the view of the street.



Will It Grow in My Area?

Similar results in other zones can be achieved with different plant choices; SHWA has these recommendations for a look like the Lozano front yard.

Trees: Instead of **9** Birch-bark cherry (*Prunus serrula*)
Paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) zones 4–8
Whitebarked Himalayan birch (*Betula jacquemontii*) zones 4–7
Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* 'Sunburst') zones 3–9

Low groundcover: Instead of **1** Creeping raspberry (*Rubus pentalobus*)
Pachysandra zones 4–9
Wild ginger (*Asarum europaeum*) zones 4–8
Heath (*Erica* sp.) some hardy to zone 4

Tall flowering perennials: Instead of **4** Spirea (*Spiraea* sp.)
Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia* 'Filigran') zones 6–9
Sedum 'Autumn Joy' zones 3–10
Aster species, many hardy to zones 4–5

Seen from the street, the Lozano landscape is dominated by rectangles of lawn and **1** Creeping raspberry groundcover (*Rubus pentalobus*), but SHWA included seasonal color as well. **2** Coreopsis 'Moonbeam' forms a parenthesis around **3** Mugo pines, and two levels up, near the house, is a large sweep of **4** spirea (*Spiraea* sp.) Lining the left side of the foundation are four **5** heavenly bamboo (*Nandina* 'Plum passion'), **6** Mexican orange (*Choisya ternata*) shrubs, **7** sedum 'Autumn Joy' and **8** purple Moor grass (*Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata').



I Think I'm Turning Japanese ... I Really Think So

The last example uses some of the same linear groundcover approach as the first home, but with a distinctly Asian result. This remodeled midcentury home has a distinctive horizontal wood facade that the new front yard complements. The biggest challenges were the shallowness of the setback from the street and the sizeable footprint of the driveway.

"We did this project after the Okies' home, and I wanted to bring some of their elements to this garden," Williamson explains. "This was the only time in my career that I had a formal idea I wanted to explore more than once. The Okies' plot was very flat, so I asked myself, What if some of the bars were sticking up in the air?"

"The idea was to have a sweep of dark smooth rocks at the entry, with two large areas of very low groundcovers. Rising out of this field of groundcovers are bars of plants with contrasting texture and colors, selected to reference the materials of the house," he says. Black mondo grass, which picks up on the black granite bands in the front entry walk, and Japanese maples are two examples of this tie-in, particularly in the fall when the trees echo the orange of the Parklex siding.



Above and upper right: The similarities between this design and the Okies' home on pages 42–43 are apparent in the row massing of single species.

Right: Winter blooming **1** heath (Erica 'Kramer's Red') brings welcome color to the cold-weather landscape. The closed gate indicates 'Not here,' as the first path leads to the side yard; the main entry is to the right of the last post.



A chunky wood-and-cable fence underplanted with sweeps of heath separates the yard from the street. "We didn't want to wall the front yard off as a separate space—it would seem too cut off. We were looking for a feeling of entry, with a light fence and a jagged path that stepped down and to the side, a sense of passing through planes on the way to the front door," Williamson continues.

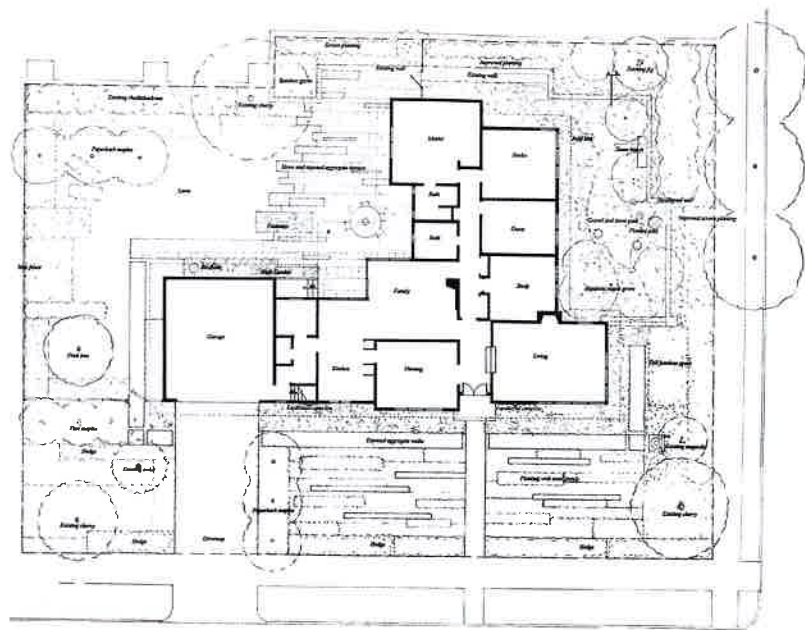
Around the back of the house, a small flagstone patio gains privacy from neighbors with a line of arborvitae, a spreading Pfitzer juniper and a weeping cherry tree. Other plants are species repeats (but different varieties) from the front yard: blue-green euphorbia, ornamental grasses and a low specimen pine.

"The river rock under the eaves and the sculptural pine tree against the house are straight from Japanese design," Williamson says. "There's a simplicity to the design, an elimination of unnecessary visual noise that seems very Japanese to me."



With a much smaller canvas than the other examples, SHWA still packed a lot of interest into the yard of this modern ranch house designed by Lane Williams of Coop15 in Seattle. From the curb, moving backward we see massed **1** heath, **2** ornamental strawberry (Fragaria sp.) groundcover, a row of **3** purple wood spurge (Euphorbia amygdaloides 'Purpurea'), **4** black mondo grass and a row of **5** Adam's needle (Yucca filamentosa 'Variegata'), which earlier in the year sent up dramatic flowers on tall spikes. The trees include a **6** Lodgepole pine (Pinus contorta), three flaming **7** Japanese maples in full fall color and a **8** weeping Japanese maple in a niche near the front door.

Top: A rear patio (see plan page 48) gains privacy from a series of tall **9** arborvitae, a **10** spreading juniper (Juniperus chinensis 'Pfitzeriana') and a **11** weeping cherry tree (Malus sp.). The yellow spiky grass is **12** Moor grass (Molina caerulea).



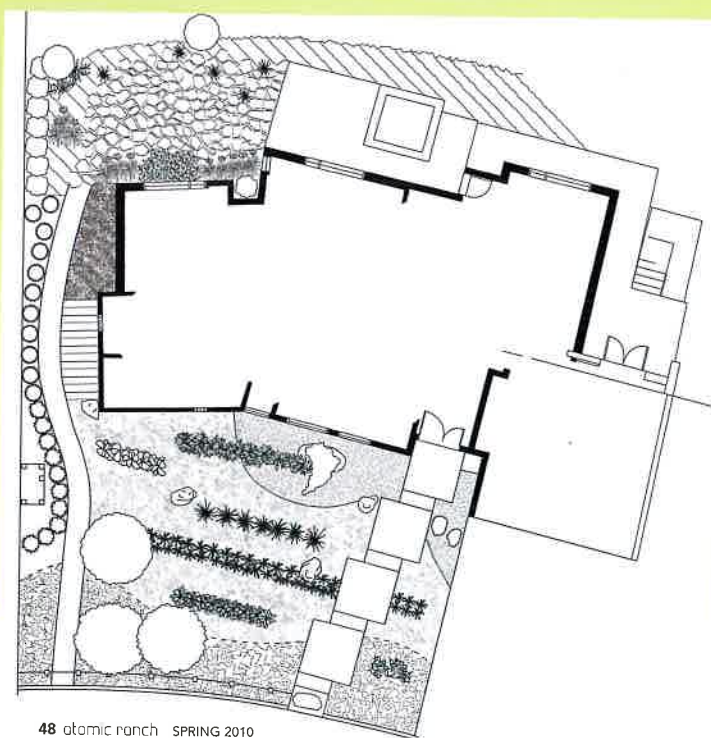
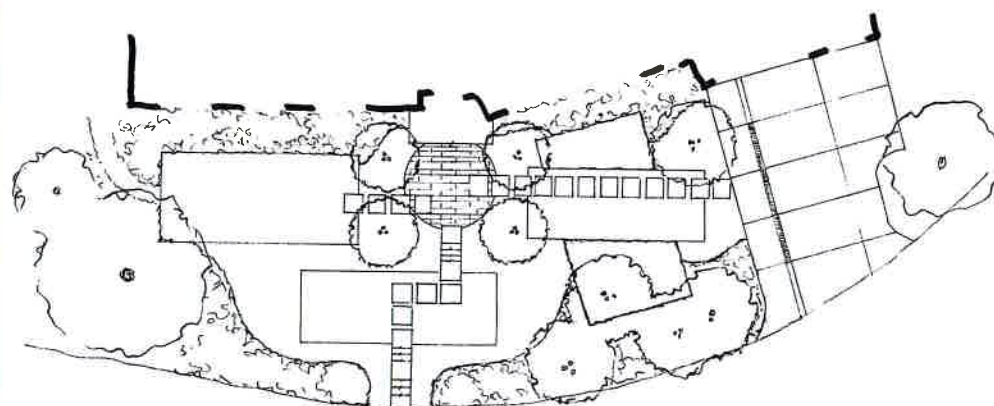
Plot Plans

Okies

"A rolled out lawn and a strip of three azaleas is not a landscape; there's no extension of the architecture that makes up the house," says Sam Williamson. "I've noticed that Eastcoasters, who are exposed to older homes, have higher expectations of what a landscape should be." The Okies' home is blessed with a number of mature trees in both front and rear yards.

Lozano

"The number of clients who say 'I want a really high-maintenance garden' is smaller than you might think," Williamson says dryly. He estimates that all of these gardens could get by with quarterly or monthly maintenance, though that is largely driven by the presence or absence of lawns. Williamson cautions homeowners to think long term with their plant choices to avoid overgrown 30' shrubs in a 10' space.



Japanese

An irregularly shaped lot and nearby neighbors were typical suburban challenges for this installation. "The Japanese maples are a sculptural violation of the strict geometry of the front yard, which gives you some relief," Williamson notes. "The design is clean and contemporary like the updated ranch house that it fronts."

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