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# Enchanting Woodland

On a large suburban lot, an Ohio couple fashion a magical cottage-style garden where shade plants thrive, fairies roam, and birds sing.

*Hosta 'Sum and Substance'*



Winter Creeper growing through a dogwood creates a natural canopy; the cobblestone path is lined with Brenda Demetriou's favorite pink flowers: Impatiens, astilbe, hosta blooms, and 'Annabelle' hydrangeas.



*Above* Brenda paints many of her birdhouses a cheerful pink lilac. Here begins a bed of 50 'Patriot' hostas that extends 100 feet. *Opposite* Hosta 'Blue Angel' sits in a bed of 'Demetriou's Gold', a hosta hybrid that John developed.

**Blessed with a wooded lot** on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio, John and Brenda Demetriou accentuated their shaded environs by adding hostas to their yard after discovering the leafy perennials on a local garden tour. They stopped at a nursery on their way home from the tour and picked out 'August Moon' and 'Blue Angel' to plant around a tree, and waited for the show to start.

But their hostas only drooped and looked sad. "We barely knew what a hosta was, and our first ones looked pretty pitiful," Brenda recalls. But the Demetrious were determined to make a go of it. Their luck began to change when another gardener invited them to join the



garden at a glance

**ZONE** 6b

**SIZE** One acre

**AGE** 12 years

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS** Heavy clay soil, mature trees, and pockets of sun. An additional ½-acre bird sanctuary lies behind the garden.



***Above left*** John Demetriou loves to turn old things into charming planters; he's filled this old goat cart with ferns, ivy, and hosta. ***Opposite*** This sweeping bed of 'Aqua Verva', 'Krossa Regal', and 'Sagae' hosta defines the border of the Demetrious' garden; behind it is a half-acre of woodland, which acts as a bird sanctuary.

Hosta Society. They become active members and started attending Hosta College—an annual event in Piqua, Ohio, where hosta enthusiasts gather to take classes and meet hybridizers. “In learning about hosta, we learned that gardeners are all kindred spirits,” Brenda says.

That was 12 years ago. Now the Demetrious' garden includes more than 450 hosta varieties, including 'Demetriou's Gold', a cultivar the couple hybridized and introduced in 2002. Because they wanted to tap into their yard's woodland feel, the Demetrious planted their beds around mature maple, ash, and locust trees original to the property, as well as the many spruce trees they planted after using them as Christmas trees. But none of it was planned. “Our garden has just evolved,” John says.

The couple embrace organic gardening and gravitate toward a natural look for their mostly shaded lot. John plants most of the containers, packing them with interesting texture and contrasting foliage. He also searches for understory trees with shallow root systems that won't compete for water with his other plantings. Although John waters the garden regularly, he believes in a “survival of the fittest” approach. “I like a crowded look in my beds—I throw it all in there and let nature take its course,” he says.

Brenda brings in the color. “And if it's pink, I buy three of them!” she says. She selects pink impatiens, astilbe, geraniums, petunias, butterfly bush, hydrangeas, fairy roses, and



Front to back: 'Lady Isabel', 'Demetriou's Gold', and 'Blue Angel' hostas.

## 10 Best Hostas For Beginners

1. **'Paul's Glory'** has large, puckered leaves with gold centers and blue-green edges. Sunlight makes the gold more vivid.
2. **'Patriot'** produces medium-size leaves with dark green centers and variegated white edges.
3. **'Striptease'** foliage sports a gold stripe in white centers. The medium-size leaves have green to blue edges.
4. **'Spilt Milk'** is named for the white drip-like lines on its foliage. The large, blue-green leaves pucker as they mature.
5. **'Great Expectations'** is a medium-size hosta. Anticipate leaves with gold centers and green and blue variegation.
6. **'Demetriou's Gold'** stands out in a crowd with chartreuse leaves. Brenda and John like to pair it with 'Blue Angel.'
7. **'Komodo Dragon'** makes a bold statement with large, dark gray-green leaves that have ruffled, piecrust edges.
8. **'Leading Lady'** wins accolades for dark green leaves with rippled gold margins that mature to creamy white.
9. **'Golden Sculpture'** lives up to its name with a vasselike growth habit and puckered, gold leaves.
10. **'Sum and Substance'** produces huge, puckered leaves in bright golden green. Partial sun enhances the color.

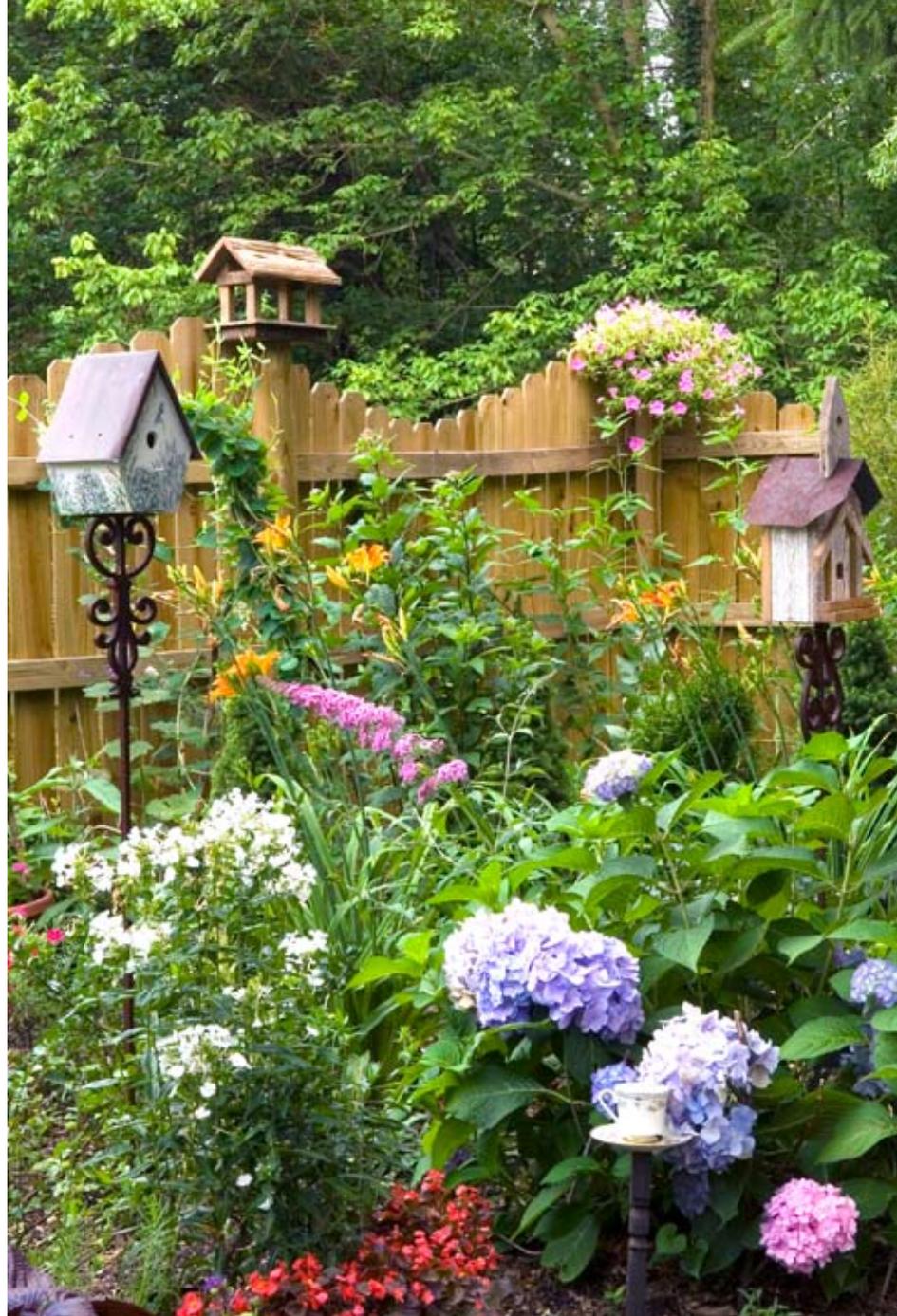
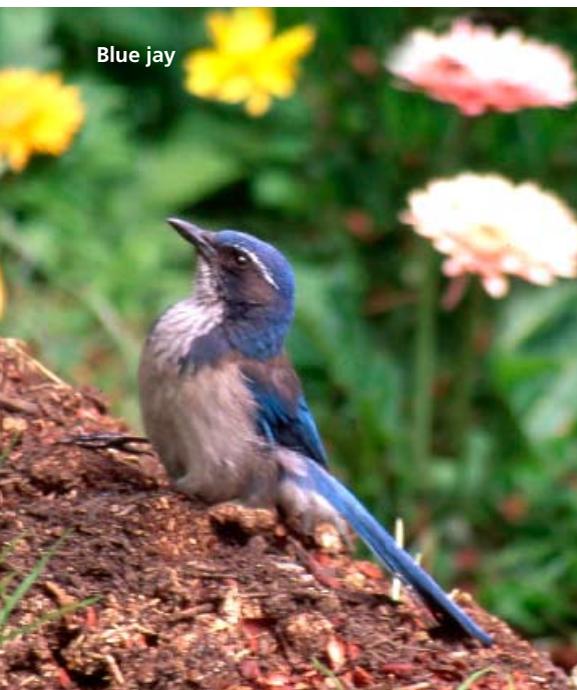


**Above left** The garden cultivates granddaughters' Emma and Olivia's imaginations. **Above right and opposite top left** The hanging impatiens' basket and checkered trio are just two of Brenda's original birdhouse designs. **Opposite** This bright pocket of full sun in the side yard is Brenda's butterfly garden, featuring *Hydrangea* 'Big Daddy', *Phlox* 'David', *Buddleia*, wild lilies, and Wave petunias.

cleome for maximum impact. Brenda even took a favorite pink geranium to the paint store and had them create a matching paint color for her patio furniture. "I call it pink lilac," she says.

Painted birdhouses are another of Brenda's color-saturated specialties. She started making birdhouses about 10 years ago and turned it into a cottage business. Most of her birdhouses accommodate nesting house wrens. The Demetrious usually have a family nesting in a birdhouse in the front yard and another family nesting in back. "They're the music of the garden," Brenda says. The half-acre behind their garden has become a bird sanctuary. Doves, cardinals, blue jays, robins, hawks, owls, and woodpeckers all join the wrens in the Demetrious' suburban escape.

With its patches of pink, singing birds, and whimsical birdhouses, the Demetrious' garden exudes a fairytale quality—making it the ideal place to hold fairy parties for their granddaughters, Olivia, 7, and Emma, 2. "We live in such a high-tech world," Brenda says, "This is a chance for something old-fashioned: the simple pleasure of playing in the garden." And for the Demetrious, it's another way to savor their enchanting woodland. ■  
For more information, see the Buyer's Guide on page 100.



## Bringing Birds into the Garden

Brenda and John Demetriou's garden teems with birds all season. Here's what keeps the birds coming back.

**Food.** The Demetriou feed birds year-round with feeders placed throughout the garden.

**Berries.** The Demetriou plant bird favorites, such as serviceberry, porcelain berry vine, crab apple, and Washington hawthorn trees, to entice their feathered friends to stop and dine.

**Water.** Brenda and John ensure there is a constant supply of water in the form of birdbaths and ponds. In the winter, they heat some of the water features so the birds' drinking sources don't freeze.

**Shelter.** Brenda's birdhouses are designed for house wrens only. The wrens feel safe in the specially designed spaces that are set at least 5 feet off the ground and can hang from a branch or sit atop a sturdy ground stake. The property's array of trees and shrubs provides additional coverage.

**Space.** The Demetriou set aside a half-acre of undeveloped woodland as a bird sanctuary—that's especially beneficial for attracting larger birds such as owls and hawks.