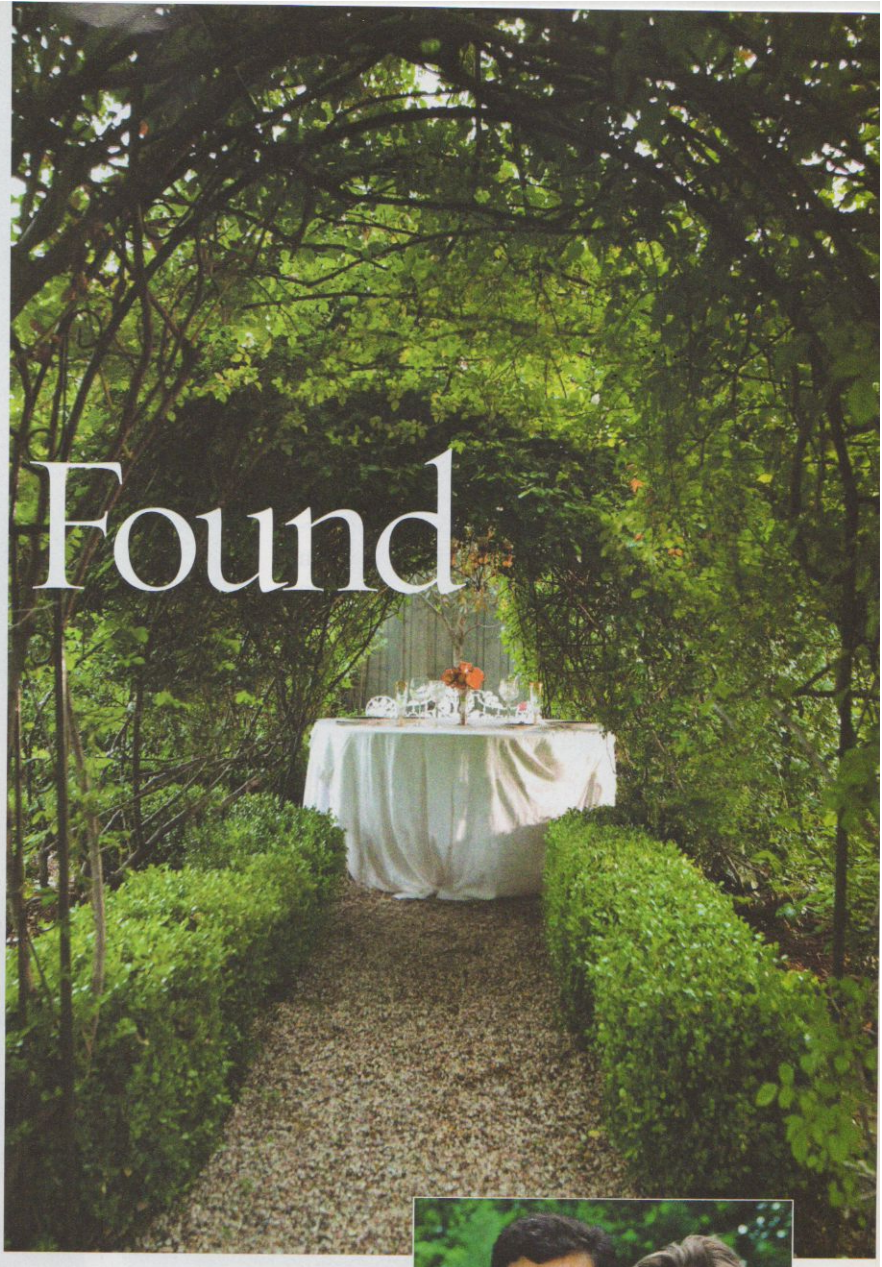
by BECKY WINN

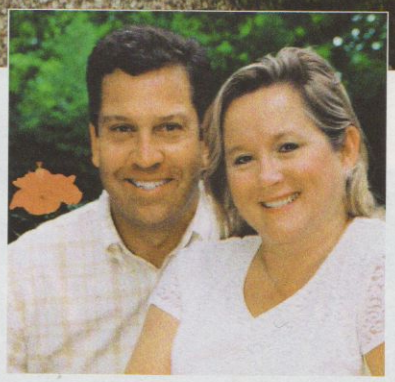
Paradise Found

The tips, tricks, and lessons learned from one Dallas family's successful garden renovation.

Behind a hedge of Leyland Cypress, right in the mid-dle of Dallas, Ray and Carol Harvey have created an oasis for their young family. Six years ago, over the objections of family and friends, the couple bought a 60-year-old house on a 1.5-acre lot that had been abandoned for 12 years. Both the house and the landscape were disheveled, to say the least. But the Harveys loved the graceful lines and charming details of the older home, and as the two self-described "outdoorsy types" looked out onto the overgrown, wooded backyard, they saw paradise. But where to begin?

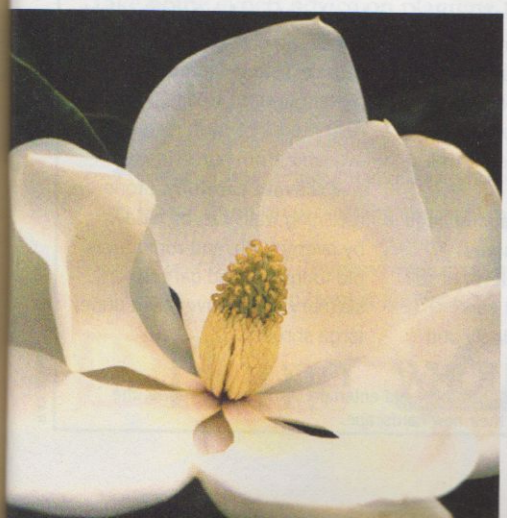
An acre-and-a-half is a great deal of land to landscape, and there was not a blade of grass. What they did have was dozens of trees and wild shrubs that had to be culled and an old swimming pool that, though in disrepair, was artfully placed. There was also an old tennis court nicely sited at the very back of the lot.





GREEN ROOM: Ray and Carol Harvey's landscape renovation turned a neglected, overgrown lot into a family-friendly garden with something for everyone: gardens for Carol, play space for the kids, and outdoor rooms for all to enjoy.

RAY HAND



In the end, the Harveys kept 17 beautiful, mature pecans and five large hackberries, as well as several smaller trees. They added a wall of magnolias to the north, six Savannah hollies near the pool, and six more to screen the tennis courts. They also planted several pear trees and crape myrtles around the lawn, for color.

Today there's a brick patio with outdoor fireplace, a rose garden, a large arbor with a seating and dining area, a secluded "Southern garden" patio surrounded by azaleas, and several fountains. Six years and three children later, they have, just as they hoped, a garden that is everything they could want for their children, their friends, and themselves. And though each one credits the other with being largely responsible for the garden's beauty, it is, in fact, a shared labor of love.

WATER FEATURE: The Harveys' generous acre-and-a-half lot gives them plenty of lawn for the children to play and room to spare for wonderful focal points and conversation spots.

TIPS ON REMODELING YOUR GARDEN

Wait a full year before doing anything. Many a hasty homeowner has disposed of lovely flowering, fruiting, or rare plants that were dormant and therefore difficult for the novice to identify.

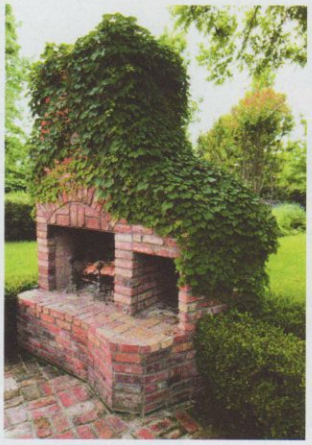
Identify trees, shrubs, and plants before you remove anything. If you're not sure you can do it, hire someone who can.

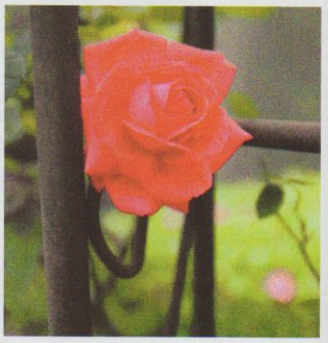
Make a master plan. It's frustrating and wasteful to spend time and money creating beautiful beds and then decide a couple of years later that was the best place for the pool. Draw it yourself, or hire a professional, but think long-term.

Healthy established plants add a look of maturity to a new landscape. Remember, too, that these plants have survived quite nicely where they are, perhaps with very little care. You can't argue with success!

There is no such thing as a "trash tree." Trees are sometimes classified as "trash trees" when they are short-lived or have weak wood. Hackberry, sycamore, and chinaberry, so-called trash trees, were planted widely in the early days of Dallas development because they grow quickly, providing shade and protection within 10 to 15 years. Oak trees may live for hundreds of years, but unless you plant large specimens, which is both costly and risky, chances are they will never attain any size in your lifetime.

Look up before you hack down a vine. Antique rambling roses, wisteria, and autumn clematis can climb into the tops of trees, creating a fabulous effect when they bloom. So you might want to think twice about cutting them down.





BLOOMS: (Above) This warm, traditional landscape includes a rose garden, magnolias, and azaleas, among many others.

The rule of thumb is to transplant in the winter, or when the plant is dormant. Water well a couple of days before, and if you aren't going to immediately return it to the landscape, place the plant in a protected area, keep the root ball covered with soil and mulch, and keep it well watered.

Be careful about raising beds around existing trees and shrubs. Elevating the level of soil around a mature plant can stress or kill it by suddenly and dramatically altering its water and oxygen access.

"Volunteer" trees are often strong and healthy, having survived the rigors of existence to date. They also often have charming contorted forms as they've grown towards the light. These can give your landscape some artistic relief from the perfect upright soldiers grown in restricted tree-farm rows that are available from nurseries.

Excavate carefully. Stone retaining walls can be hidden by overgrowth, and romantic, old fountains and garden statuary could have fallen under large shrubs.

GREAT OUTDOORS: (Left and above left) Knowing that they'd want to relax and entertain outdoors year-round, the Harveys added both an arbor and fireplace to the plans for their new hardscape.

RAY HAND