

Even in late fall, the meadow continues to be a rich, vibrant tapestry composed of plants such as showy goldenrod. RIGHT: The Goshen rock pathway leading to the front door passes stands of New England asters, prairie dropseed, and love grass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*).

A NATURAL APPEAL

A lot of study and careful selection of plants make this sweeping Hudson Valley landscape look as if it's always belonged By TOVAH MARTIN Photography by KINDRA CLINEFF





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: In keeping with Sternberg's original request, the meadow laps at the foundation of the house. • With windows placed to admire the views, the house overlooks the thyme courtyard, where an exposed ledge is planted with 'Snow Flurry' aster and sweet fern. • A patio overlooks the meadow and the Oblong Valley with Indian feather performing late in the season.

DAN STERNBERG was struggling to explain what he wanted in a landscape. He had no specific checklist for the garden he was trying to forge; it was more about honoring the surrounding beauty. Standing beside his newly constructed Hudson Valley home four years ago, he attempted to convey his vision to landscape architect Jamie Purinton during their initial meeting. "We want the house to look like it was just dropped into this space," he began, finishing with, "and I don't want to own a lawn mower." That's when Purinton enveloped Sternberg in a huge embrace. That hug was the start of a collaboration that began in 2015 and has gained fervor ever since.

Sternberg and his wife, Debbie Cooper, originally saw the For Sale sign at the foot of Star Hill while cycling in the area but stalled for a year before purchasing the 18-acre largely abandoned horse pasture and woodland. They asked architects Demetriades + Walker to design a contemporary house that takes its cues from the agricultural

surroundings in a strong, sleek, metal-and-barnboard type of way. Windows overlook the Oblong Valley below, and massive glass doors disappear into wall pockets, erasing the boundaries between inside and out. The scene begged for a landscape suitable for framing.

As they stood in the blank canvas left by the contractors, it didn't take long for the couple and Purinton to agree that "dropped into this space" ideally meant a meadow. But was it possible? That's when Purinton disappeared for a long walk around the 18 acres. When she returned clutching a handful of asters, penstemon, yarrow, milkweed, rudbeckia, sweet fern, showy goldenrod, and little bluestem already thriving in the hinterlands of the site, they knew that a meadow was feasible. From that "handheld bouquet," a mix was eventually formulated based on the local flora embellished with mountain mint, beebalm, and other blossoming and warp-and-woof elements to bolster the beauty.



"A MEADOW SOFTENS AND GROUNDS A HOUSE, KNITTING TOGETHER THE EXISTING ECOSYSTEM WITH THE CULTIVATED DOMAIN. WHEN OUR WORK JOINS NATURE SEAMLESSLY, WE HAVE SUCCEEDED."

—LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT JAMIE PURINTON

The Making of a Meadow

Although it's meant to look absolutely effortless, making a meadow is actually a complex balancing act between nature, the site, and a dedicated team (in this case, Stacia and Angel Montenegro of Garden Tenders). Nobody knows that better than landscape architect Jamie Purinton, who has orchestrated many. Each one poses its own unique challenges and rewards, but all follow the same basic road map to success:

CONDUCT A SITE SURVEY.

To respect the ecosystem already in place, the first step is always to meticulously inventory the flora growing on the site with a botanist.

ANALYZE THE SOIL AND HABITAT TYPES.

Before composing a meadow mix, test the pH and evaluate the soil type while learning as much as possible about the available light, moisture levels, and erosion issues.

CREATE A CUSTOM SEED MIX.

Discuss the palette and target height of the meadow, and then craft a mixture of plants that will play well together.

MONITOR THE MEADOW TO IDENTIFY SEEDLINGS.

Weeds can be a major issue in a young meadow. Learn to identify weeds and remove them as the meadow evolves. Temporary "nurse" plants such as oats and annual rye can serve as space holders while the meadow is maturing. Perennial ground covers, such as hardworking carex and poverty oat grass, also discourage weed growth.

REMAIN WATCHFUL.

A meadow is meant to change with time and requires vigilance to sustain its successful evolution.



LEFT: 'Snow Flurry' aster joins thyme and creeping phlox to blanket the outcropping beyond the courtyard. INSET GRID: In the meadow, a mix of components, including anise hyssop, native yarrow, spotted beebalm, and showy goldenrod, play well together and provide interest throughout the season. ABOVE: In the newly installed meadow, an existing orchard was retained.

Of course, it took a lot of research and experimentation while the "ecological matrix" (Purinton's term for the resulting ecosystem) was being forged. In addition to the couple's requests for a performance that lingered for the longest possible season of interest, meadow-nesting birds and native pollinators also figured in the final configuration. "This is a habitat," Purinton says. "And of the utmost importance is making an ecosystem that is sustainable over time. The making of a meadow doesn't end when you seed it. Actually, that's just the beginning."

Four years later, the landscape at Star Hill continues to evolve. Beyond the broadloom usually associated with a meadow, vertical elements were preserved and inserted. Many cedar trees were left intact, as was an original apple orchard. Additionally, groves of sumacs, crabapples, and birches now

dot the land. And the seemingly indigenous landscape laps at the foundation of the house just as Sternberg wished.

The meadow was only one facet of what became a tribute to going lawn mower-less and doing it beautifully. Behind the house, a deck steps down into a "lawn" of creeping thyme that bursts into blossom in spring and provides a frothy, ground-hugging blanket throughout the growing season.

To make the transition to the wilder areas, rock ledges that brace the soil as the land rises are draped in creeping thyme, phlox, and the juniper-like 'Snow Flurry' aster. In keeping with the "no mow" mission, pathways wandering outward are bedded with walkable creeping thyme. Everything works in concert to make the space appear wonderfully unstudied. By design, it is difficult to discern where the garden ends and nature takes the reins. ❧