

## DESIGN &amp; DECORATING

## GARDEN TOUR

No Lawn?  
No Loss

Water-conscious Angelenos who decided to skip the sod in their yard rarely miss the Kentucky Blue, thanks to these landscaping principles

BY CATHERINE ROMANO

**M**ANY OF US have considered opting out of the Great American Lawn competition, only to be dissuaded by the specter of Joni Mitchell's forlorn "paved paradise"—a yard that resembles a parking lot more than Eden. For clients with a walled front yard in Los Angeles, local landscape designer Patricia Benner skirted that risk, creating a "dry garden" that requires little water, and dispenses with thirsty turf while still sustaining nerve-salving verdure.

She urged ivy to grow up some walls, and trained (or espaliered) fruit trees to grow flat against others. She introduced field-grown olive trees to form umbrellas of silver green overhead. (In lawnless urban gardens, she pointed out, foliage on a wall or overhead simi-

larly plays a big role.)

Ms. Benner used hardscape materials to define a welcoming, practical layout for the approximately 1,800-square-foot yard. In the fire-side seating area, for example, she established a floor with poured-in-place concrete, edged it with a contrasting border of gray Mexican pebbles set in concrete, then surrounded all with pea gravel. "I wanted to create carpets for the major living spaces," she said.

More foliage in an array of textures and hues further distracts from the absence of grassy turf. There's nothing about her scheme that couldn't be recreated outside California, Ms. Benner noted. You can find plants with coarse, medium and fine leaves as well as foliage ranging in color from char-treuse to bronze in every region of the U.S. So no matter where you hang your hoe, you can say goodbye to demanding lawn grass.



## CLIMBING THE WALLS

For a "dry garden" in Los Angeles, area landscape designer Patricia Benner renounced water-hogging sod. The Boston ivy she planted along the stucco wall not only softened the space, "it brings to the vertical surface the green that's lacking in the ground plain." Also illus-

trated here is Ms. Benner's penchant for repeating plant materials at varying heights. To the left of the fireplace a jade shrub (brightened by sunlight) crouches, while on the fireplace's right, another jade bush sits in a tall planter. "I like to leapfrog species around the garden," she said. Plants repeat but not predictably.



## PARTY OF TWO

"Maybe it's the East Coaster in me, but I always want dark green in the garden to make me feel cool," said Ms. Benner, who grew up in New Jersey. Against the wall near the burbling koi pond, a laurel hedge stands in for the nonexistent lawn. One of three field-grown olive trees punctuates the end of this seating area. "They have gnarly, sculptural trunks," said the designer, who noted that, in the eastern U.S., a "wonderful old apple tree" would serve. "This space has nice morning light," she said, "and each day the couple enjoys their coffee in what they call 'the breakfast room.'"

## EARTHY CHANDELIERS

A lawnless yard can leave you feeling like you're sitting on a driveway. Alleviate any risk of that with organic, homey decorations that you might find inside a house. These basket lights are strung from the branches of olive trees like ceiling lights. Over time, nestled against the leaves, they have mellowed to a gray brown that complements the weathered cedar of the Smith & Hawken seats and tables that furnish the yard. Said Ms. Benner of the trees themselves, "The leaves work so well with the grays in the garden, and their gray-green color sets the tone at the eye level and above."



## A STAGGERED PATH

A hopsotch of pavers leads from the main gate in the wall to the front door of the house. "The pattern repeats every 5 or 6 feet and draws you along," said Ms. Benner. This sense of "movement" contrasts with the static rectangles of concrete on which the "dining-" and "living-room" furniture sits. Just left of the gate opening, a germander

sports tiny flowers of a pale blue that recurs in potted plants elsewhere in the garden. "You can have variety, but it's important to have elements that repeat the color, even if they're a different texture," said Ms. Benner. Another example: At various points in the garden, she strategically used lavender and a succulent called echeveria "Afterglow," with a similar pale purple shade.



## AN IMPORTANT STEP

Risers clad in encaustic tiles, a feature found throughout the house, appear in the garden as well. The home's Spanish roof tiles and its front entry's stairs informed the use of terra cotta in the garden, both here as tiles and as free-standing pots. Originally (and recreated for this photo), elfin thyme separated the pavers. The thyme would fare better in climates with regular rain, said Ms. Benner, and the owners have since replaced the diminutive herb with more-practical pebbles.

