

city style

dream weaver

fibre artist Lucille Crighton
creates luscious tapestries full
of colour and texture—on her
loom and in her shade-filled
city garden



by yvonne cunrington
photography by joan de grey
styling by barbara purdy

the thriving beds of shrubs and perennials

that fibre artist Lucille Crighton has planted in her garden in Toronto's Beach neighbourhood reveal her mastery of form, colour and texture. It's a talent she exercises with equal flair whether she's weaving her magic with plants or yarn.

Past and present are woven together, too, in the attractive century-old mottled brick house that has been in Crighton's family for more than 75 years. (The bricks, she explains, were rescued from the great Toronto fire of 1904. "That's why some are charred black, while others are orange, burgundy, tan and taupe.") Her grandfather bought the Arts-and-Crafts-style house in 1927, and Crighton grew up there. Though she spent some of her adult years living in other Ontario communities, she chose to return to the familiar

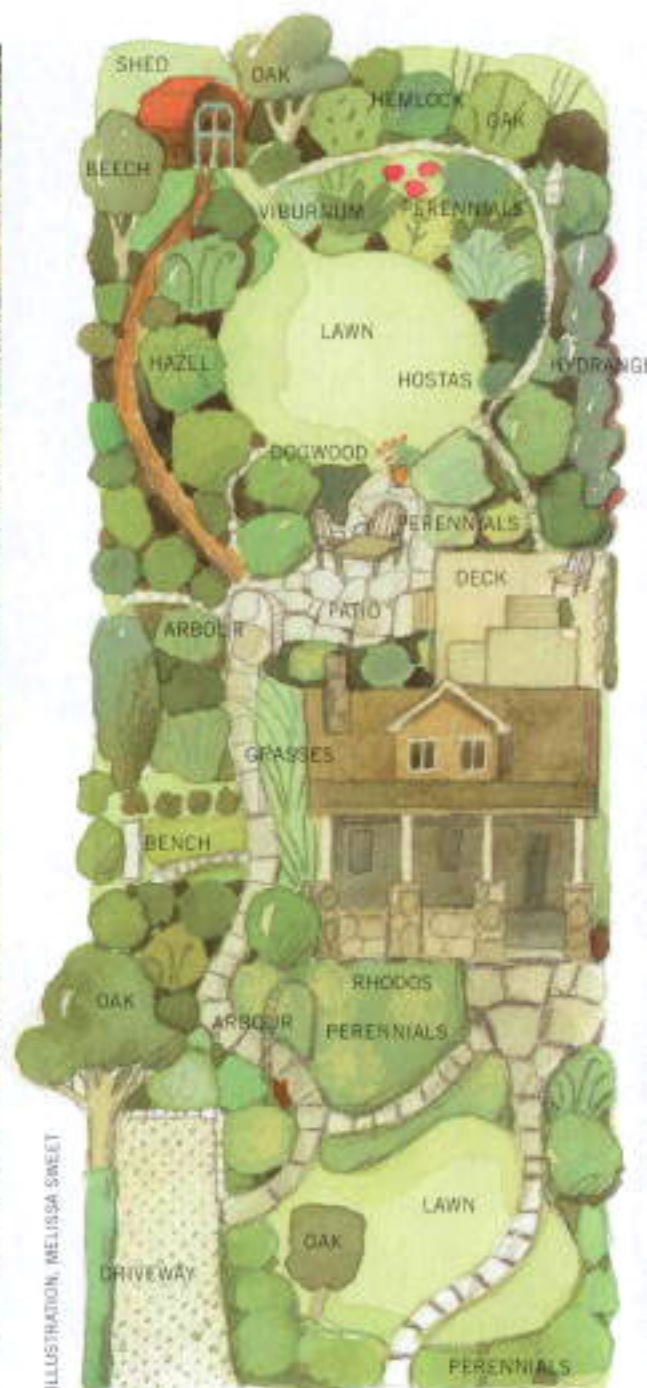


Surrounded by a tumult of perennials including lilies and *Astilbe*, a stone patio set with rustic twig armchairs is the perfect spot for tea. *Cushions, pillows, throw, Red Heron Essentials.* OPPOSITE PAGE: The Arts-and-Crafts-style house has been in the family since 1927; the eco-friendly driveway features a concrete grid that allows grass to grow in the open spaces.





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Toronto artist Lucille Crighton takes a break from weaving and weeding (though she says she plants so densely that weeds aren't much of an issue).

homestead in the late '80s after her mother died. It has been her home and workplace ever since.

Crighton's intricately woven, one-of-a-kind jackets, vests and scarves in colours ranging from jewel tones to neutral hues are in high demand with private clients; she also sells her creations at galleries, weaving the unique fabrics on her four-pound shaft loom. Not surprisingly, her garden is a four-season source of inspiration. "My garden inspires my work in subtle ways," says Crighton, who has sometimes brought in flowers, leaves and bark from the garden to compare them with her yarns and to consider the subtleties of colour. "The fall colours are especially beautiful. Hydrangea 'Unique' is wondrous as the colours change from white to soft brown-pink to bright pink. The golden colour of the hosta leaves dying back is magnificent, and the late daylight is magical."

Like most gardens where shade predominates—her planting beds are nestled under a canopy of mature oaks—Crighton's property, 50 feet (15

OPPOSITE PAGE: Backed by a splendid woven twig screen, a wooden chair affords a sunny seat on the back deck; cerise *Astilbe*, ferns and a tall clump of toad lilies (*Tricyrtis*) mingle alongside. Cushion, pillow, *Red Heron Essentials*.

ABOVE LEFT: In a shady corner, a handcrafted birdhouse with an ecclesiastical touch nestles among snowy hydrangeas and low-growing spirea. ABOVE CENTRE: A stone path winds toward the front door through multi-layered plantings—from groundcovering deadnettle (*Lamium*) and slightly taller coral bells (*Heuchera*) to medium-sized *Sedum*, *Ligularia* with its big rounded leaves (in the foreground), pink *Astilbe*, a multitude of hostas and, finally, tall hydrangea. Crighton loves their tall foliage colours as much as their blooms.



Multi-hued hostas, cream-striped ribbon grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and a gold/green standard *Euonymus* reveal Crighton's love of variegated leaves, which create the appearance of dappled sunlight.

Crighton's top picks for shade



Astilbe x arendsii 'Fanal'



Kirengeshoma palmata



Cypripedium reginae



Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost'

Astilbe spp.: Crighton grows a number of cultivars, including *Astilbe x arendsii* 'Fanal' (bronze foliage, red flowers) and *A. taquetii* 'Superba', one of the most imposing varieties with brilliant rosy-purple flower spikes above unusual crinkled foliage. Astilbes need rich, moist, even boggy soil and, if given that, will also thrive in sun. **Zone 4**

Deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*): An evergreen fern with interesting tufted leaves that likes humus-rich soil on the acidic side. **Zone 5**

'Jack Frost' Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost'): A perennial with tiny clusters of blue flowers in early spring and round silver leaves highlighted by narrow green

veins. It likes moist, rich soil. **Zone 4**

Showy lady's slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*): A North American wildflower with delicate white-and-pink blooms thrives in humusy, moist woodland conditions. **Zone 3**

'Janet Starnes' hellebore (*Helleborus argutifolius* 'Janet Starnes'): A hellebore with speckled leaves and light green flowers, it likes neutral to alkaline soil. **Zone 6**

'Raspberry Ice' coral bells (*Heuchera* 'Raspberry Ice'): Foliage is raspberry and silver while the blooms are brilliant two-toned pink, giving a wonderful contrast. It prefers moist but well-drained soil. **Zone 4**



Astilbe, meadowsweet (*Filipendula*), daylilies and a huge blue hosta line a winding stone path; the quaint but useful shed in the background neatly hides the work area including a compost pile and potting table.



Hostas cluster around the base of a big red oak that gives the back garden its high shade; variegated Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica* 'Variegata') in the foreground is lovely but potentially invasive.

'Albury Purple' St. John's wort (*Hypericum x inodorum* 'Albury Purple'): With leaves ranging in colour from green to purple, this has little yellow flowers in summer followed by red berries. Should have part sun for good flowering, as well as fertile, moist soil. **Zone 5**

Yellow wax-bells (*Kirengeshoma palmata*): Growing three feet (90 cm) tall, it has striking felt-looking leaves on wiry stems and remarkable flowers resembling yellow shuttlecocks toward the end of summer. Give it moist soil enriched with leaf mould. **Zone 5**

'Gilt Edge' toad lily (*Tricyrtis formosana* 'Gilt Edge'): A magnificent plant sporting shiny gold-edged leaves and starfish-shaped white flowers with heavy purple speckling, it blooms in late summer and sporadically into fall. Prefers rich, moist soil. **Zone 6**

metres) wide and 120 feet (36 metres) long, has a relaxed atmosphere, but when she started the garden in the mid-'90s, "it was largely grass and overgrown raspberry canes," she says. Now, lush beds tumble with plants, creating an effect that is both playful and peaceful. Flanking the front porch are hydrangea and rhododendrons teamed with an assortment of lush perennials, including foam-flowers (*Tiarella*), primroses (*Primula*), Astilbe, hostas, meadowsweet (*Filipendula*) and late-blooming martagon lilies.

Last year, looking for new places to plant—the back and side yards were well established—she added a perennial bed in the front at the sidewalk. Now her small central front lawn is surrounded with shrubs and perennials. "Every day, there's a little more growth to enjoy with my morning coffee," she says, "but I've kept a bit of lawn in the front and the back so my grandchildren have a place to play when they visit." Instead of paving the driveway, she chose an environmentally friendly concrete

grid system, which allows for a stable parking area but has open-pore spaces filled with soil where grass grows and rainwater can be absorbed rather than washed into the street.

Crighton keeps garden maintenance simple—before planting, she amends the soil with compost or well-rotted manure, and beds are planted so densely that weeds aren't much of an issue. The abundant leaves from the red oaks that give her property its pleasant high shade are left on the garden over the winter. "When I rake them all up in the spring, I get more than 50 bags full," she says.

It is in the back garden—reached by passing through a spacious side yard 18 feet (5.4 metres) wide and walking down a curving flagstone path—that Crighton's love affair with variegated plants and perennials with unusual foliage is most in evidence. Here, she has planted many hostas, including 'Antioch' (whose green leaves have margins that start out yellow and then turn white), 'Lunar Eclipse' (which has

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chartreuse leaves edged in cream) and 'Gold Standard' (gold with green margins). Edging one bed is a form of Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica* 'Variegata'), which stands out in midsummer with its attractive leaves of white, green and pink.

The back garden can be glimpsed from the upstairs windows of Crighton's yarn room, where shelves on all four walls brim with colourful yarn, as well as from the adjoining pattern-making and sewing room. The area is lushly planted with shrubs, including the yellow-flowering *Kerria japonica*, evergreen boxwood and yew, and ornamental grasses (*Miscanthus*, *Panicum* and *Pennisetum* species). *Ligularia stenocephala* 'The Rocket' prefers the shade at the side of the house, where the ivy-clad wall adds to the cool ambience.

Although her back garden is mainly shady, Crighton studied the patterns of sun and shade when she first began planning it, and was able to take advantage of several bright spots to add perennials such as Asiatic and oriental lilies, varieties of *Sedum*, phlox and *Echinacea*. "I like to push the envelope when it comes to sun-lovers," she admits.

A small deck off the back of the house leads to a random flagstone patio, where three rustic twig armchairs have been arranged around a small table to create an inviting spot for enjoying the garden. In the flower beds that curve around a small central lawn, Crighton has created a rich tapestry of colour, texture and form with hundreds of different perennials interspersed with favourite shrubs such as 'Purple Fountain' beech, doublefile viburnum (*Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii'), service-berry (*Amelanchier canadensis*), eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), a corkscrew hazel standard, a number of different hydrangeas and an attractive green-leafed Japanese maple whose cultivar name she has lost track of.

For Crighton, seeking out interesting new plants is as seductive and creative as choosing yarn. She gets great enjoyment from unusual plants such as turtlehead (*Chelone obliqua*), toad lily (*Tricyrtis hirta*), native North American lady's slipper orchids (*Cypripedium reginae*) and yellow wax-bells (*Kirengeshoma palmata*). But as this confirmed plant lover says, "I can't really decide if I have favourites. I enjoy them all with their different growth habits, textures and nuances of colour. It's so hard to pick favourites—I love them all." □