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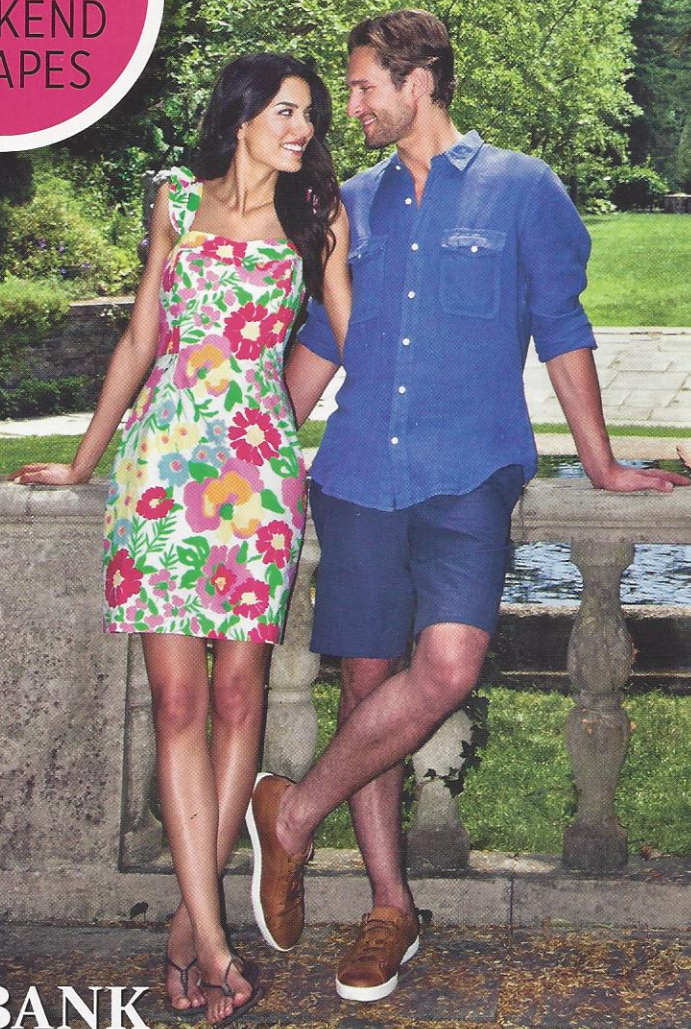
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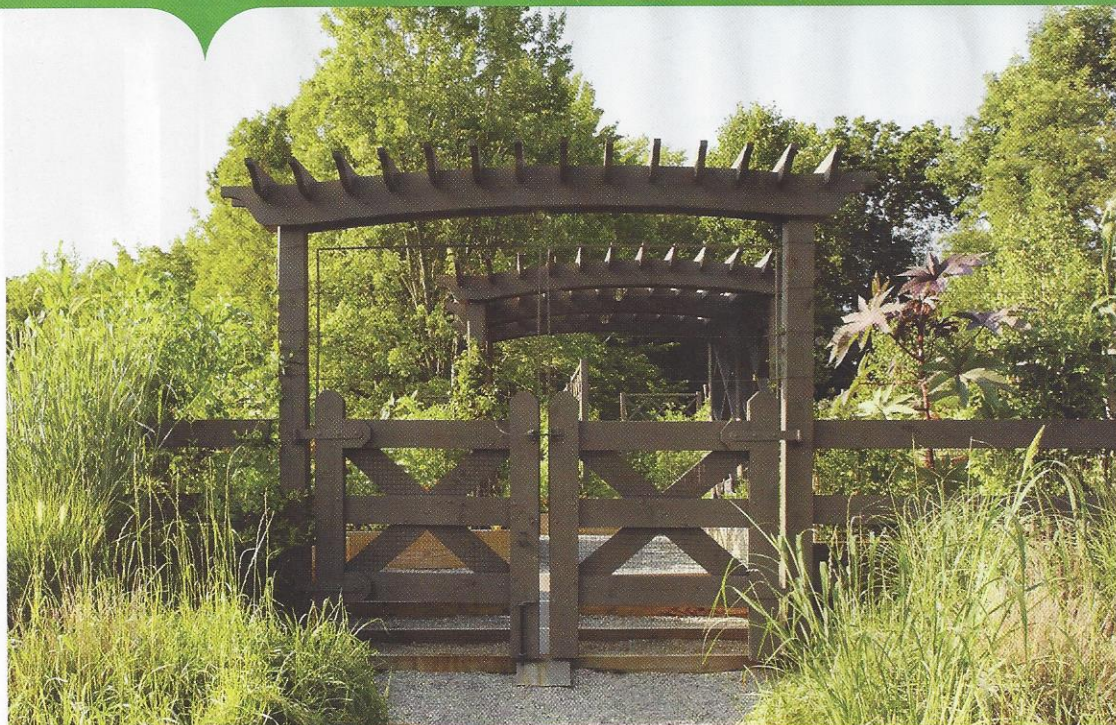


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**RED BANK
SHOPPING SPREE**



HEAVEN'S GATE: Homeowners Dan Ruhland and Laurence Craig added the fence and gate around their Califon garden after losing much of their original crop to roaming deer. Below, a basket of last summer's bounty included fairytale eggplant, peppers, tomatoes and squash. Bottom left, marigolds ward off pesky bugs, letting surrounding runner beans and rosemary flourish. Bottom right, a bird's nest gourd is mainly decorative, but could be hollowed out to provide a home for a winged thing, says Ruhland.

Easy Does It

A green thumb and a gardening greenhorn turned fallow land into a productive garden —without breaking the bank, or their backs.

WRITTEN BY LAUREN PAYNE

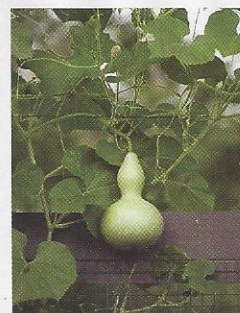
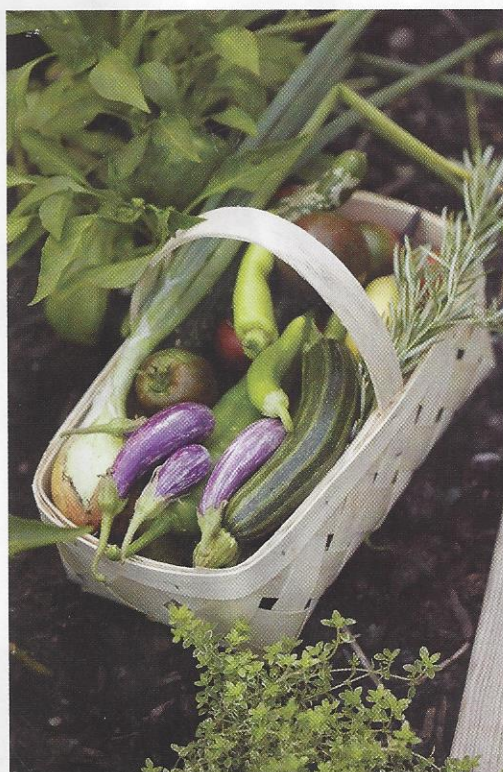
Tending a 3,000-square-foot garden behind his home is almost child's play for interior designer Dan Ruhland. After all, he grew up on 1,200 acres of farmland in Wisconsin. "I learned at an early age to grow food," he says. So when he and partner Laurence Craig, a caterer, bought 10 acres of a former orchard in Califon, Hunterdon County, five years ago, Ruhland set out to do what he grew up doing: grow food.

"The first year we literally just cut some rows into the lawn," Ruhland says. "It was gratifying to watch everything sprout from the lawn, but the deer had more than their fair share. The second year we were smart and put a fence around it."

Even though creating beautiful, festive food is Craig's livelihood, rolling up his sleeves to grow the ingredients did not tempt him. "In the beginning, he said, 'Knock yourself out,'" Ruhland relates. "But seeing really fresh food, Larry became interested in the seasonal aspect of gardening. We also got into heirloom varieties and different colors and types of vegetables. Now he's totally into it. We share all the responsibilities. It's amazing how much better fresh-from-the-garden food can be."

Cutting back much of the lawn behind the house, they created raised beds. "We learned along the way," Ruhland says.

With a little planning, and some investment in equipment, the pair learned that a 3,000-square-foot garden doesn't have to take up an enormous amount



PHOTOS: LAURA MOSS

of time. For instance, they lay black plastic over the beds to prevent weeds and cut holes for the seeds and seedlings to peep through. "It practically eliminates the need for weeding all season," Ruhland says.

Around the beds, they put down a thick gravel path that also discourages weeds. They invested about \$2,000 in an underground sprinkler system. "Part of the cost was bringing the water all the way back to the remote location of the garden," Ruhland says. "But running hoses back there and hand watering would have made the garden a daily chore rather than something we enjoy."

Their fertilizer? Poop from their four llamas. "We collect it each week, run it through a shredder and bag it. In the spring, we spread it on the beds and use a small tiller to mix it in," Ruhland says. Dedicated composters, they use that as fertilizer as well.

The result of this managed labor is a bounty of fruits, vegetables and herbs. Peppers grow with ease and return every year if protected. Chamomile is easy to grow, too, Ruhland says.

"Marigolds are good companion plants," he adds. "They have good insect-repellent capabilities and tend to keep the bugs away."

Craig occasionally uses some of the herbs for his catering events, but most of the bounty is enjoyed by the couple. "We eat what we grow," says Ruhland, "but sometimes there's so much, we have to give it to our neighbors." ■



GROWTH STOCKS:

Above, a variety of sages cohabit with horseradish. Left, sunflowers and cornstalks tower over red okra in the foreground. Below, Ruhland and Craig eventually ripped out the lawn and installed raised beds and gravel paths. The latter help suppress weed growth. A built-in sprinkler system keeps everything neat, eliminating hoses running this way and that. The garden rewards the pair with vegetables and herbs they use all summer and into fall.

Their Day Jobs:

Dan Ruhland Designs:

347-683-9837

Laurence Craig Distinctive Celebrations:

973-761-0190

