



Stephen &amp; Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

## Death To Yard Work – Design To Avoid High Maintenance

Only once has a client asked for a high maintenance garden. She was between careers, looking for a hobby and wished to maintain the garden solo. We knew we could easily fulfill her need. We also knew her priorities would change, so we designed with strategies so the garden could easily transition from higher to lower maintenance. Here are some tips on how to design with low maintenance in mind.

Vine-covered structures may include trellises, arbors and pergolas. Climbing vines require frequent trimming to keep them in bounds. More than a few could be mayhem. A vine that seriously ups the ante is creeping fig. Typically grown on a wall it needs constant trimming to keep it in place. Without proper supervision it can find its way through windows and into attics. When removed from painted surfaces it removes the paint. Better grab a paint brush! Creeping fig also likes to grow horizontally and then upward into neighboring plants. **Solution:** use only two or three climbing vines in the garden and if using creeping fig, confine it to a small area no more than six feet in height without windows or doors to trim around. Add an edging in the ground to note its desired boundary.

Shrubs that are sheared look unkempt when just a few sprouts extend beyond the body of foliage. This requires constant trimming to keep a neat and tidy appearance. Topiaries are trimmed this way and require an even higher level maintenance. **Solution:** ban the power or hand shears and use hand pruners. The Walt Disney World horticulturists discovered maintenance hours were less when hand pruning supplanted shearing. There were also many more flowers on blooming plants since the flower buds were not sheared off. This means more flowers for pollinators. In addition, select plants that require little if no pruning.

A striking display of color from annual bedding plants requires four (or five change outs if seasonal end of year holiday color is desired) throughout the year. Besides the labor, there is also additional



Above: A container with super low maintenance succulents

cost for the plants. **Solution:** use of longer lasting perennials, succulents, or small shrubs with colorful foliage reduces the need for replanting. Also, plant them in containers to up the impact while using fewer annuals.

Stone mulch can look impressive when first installed. Add the inevitable leaf litter, grass clippings, and wind-driven organic materials and the spaces between the stones fill with soil. This provides perfect conditions for weed seeds to germinate. Mechanically removing weeds from the stone is laborious and removing, washing, and reinstalling the stone is unrealistic and unsustainable. **Solution:** use renewable organic mulch such as oak leaves, pine bark, pine straw, Florimulch, or eucalyptus. Amongst many other benefits it will also add nutrients to the soil to feed the plants.



Above: Dwarf Walter's viburnum hand pruned and floriferous.



Above: Bignonia capreolata 'Tangerine Beauty' - cross vine, on an arch.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.