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Lessons from the garden

Imagine the possibilities

by Carol Graham

"Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better," said Albert Einstein.

Gardening has always eluded me. Not the gardens themselves, but the work to make them. I have gone out of my way to see them — Brooklyn, the Bronx, London, Giverny, and more, but no gardener am I.

I am lucky, though, to know people who create gardens and allow me to visit. I know that there are lessons in the gardens. Taking time to listen and look deep for those lessons is what I can do these days. That has to be enough.

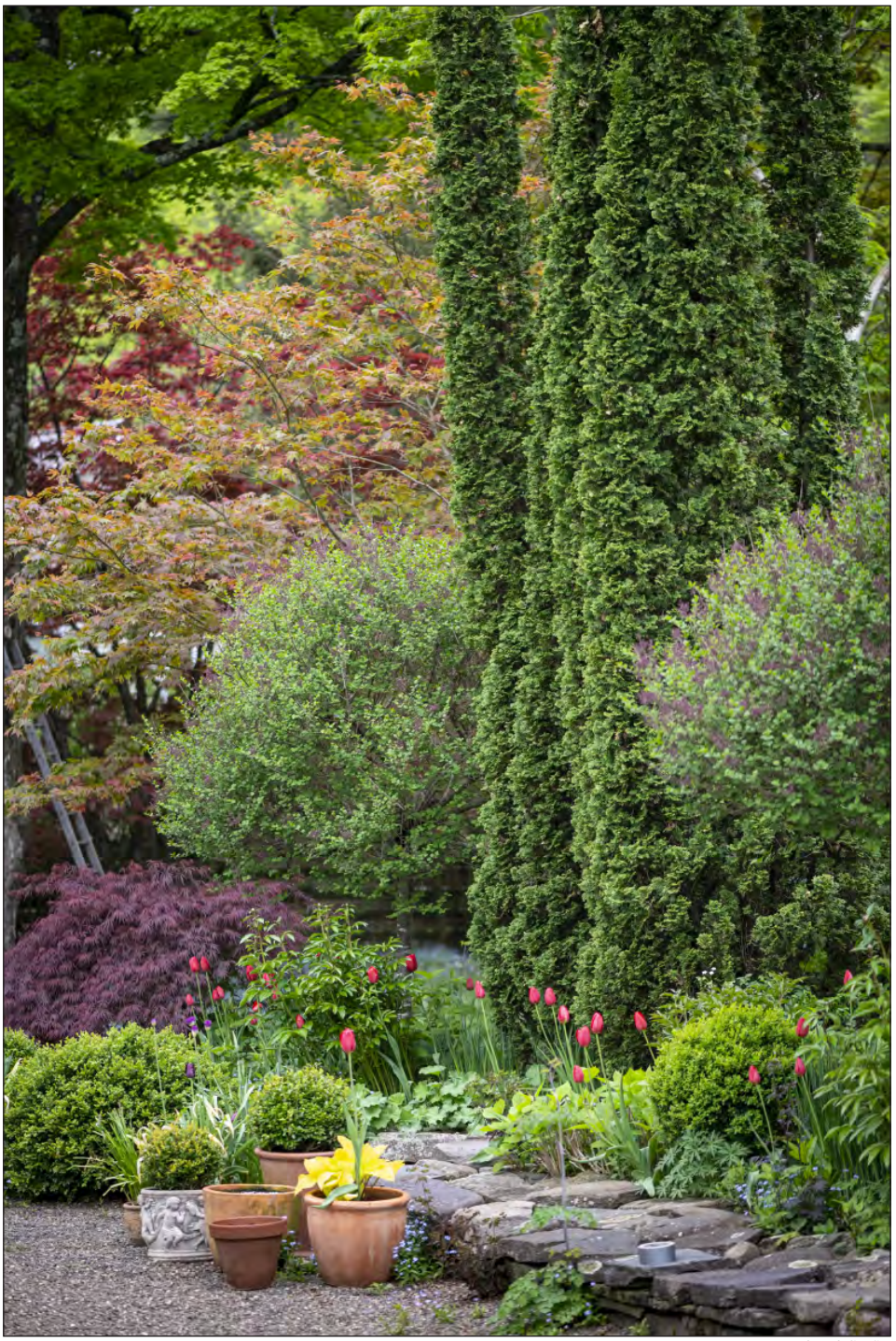
#1 Patience

"Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace," said May Sarton.

Dean Riddle, a Hudson Valley garden designer, has been creating and caring for beautiful gardens over many years, primarily in settings not his own. He carefully considers the surroundings, the architecture and the landscape. He brings a well-educated and acutely tuned knowledge to each project. I have seen a great deal of his work over the last decade, each one more beautiful than the last.

This year I was introduced to a Phoenicia garden that he was a part of in its initial stages more than 20 years ago, and then turned over by him to its owners for care and cultivation thereafter.

He still knows this garden intimately and speaks of its beginnings



DION OGUST

DION OGUST

and its evolution since. The arborvitae columns towering above the roofline just outside the door to Roger Griffith and Tomoya Minowa's 1930s bungalow were once not more than five feet tall. When he planted them two decades ago. Dean envisioned their current stature. Having to wait, Roger and Tomoya focused on other areas, experimenting elsewhere in the garden.

Hudson Valley Living

Home, Lawn & Garden

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ADVERTISING: Lynn Coraza, Pam Courselle, Susan Griffin, Elizabeth Jackson, Tobi Watson, Jenny Bella
PRODUCTION MANAGER: Joe Morgan
PRODUCTION: Diane Congello-Brandes, Josh Gilligan
CIRCULATION: Dominic Labate
COVER PHOTO BY Dion Ogust

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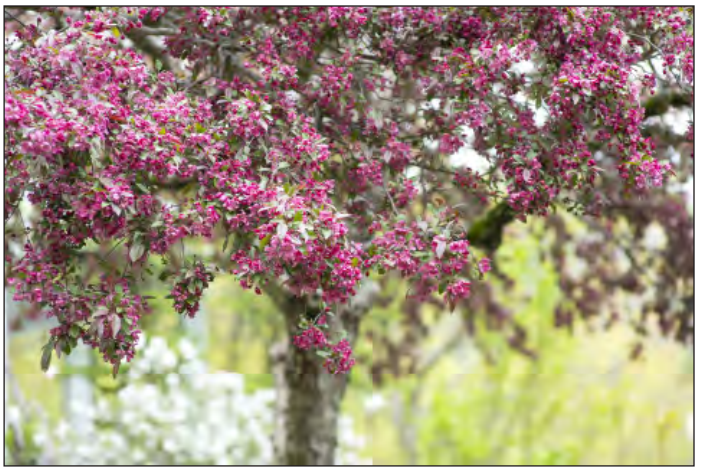
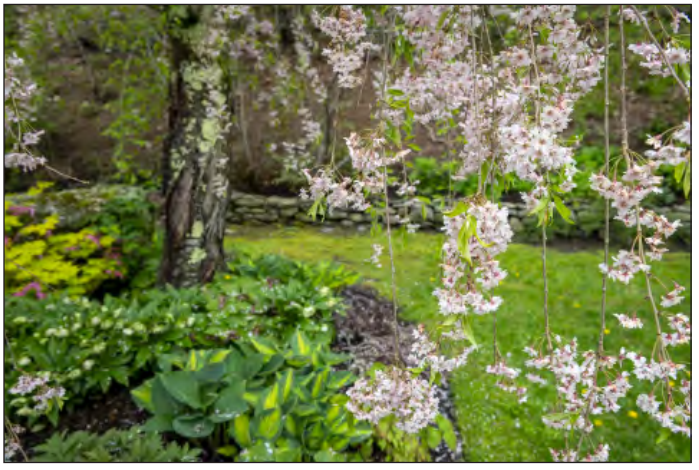
Ulster Publishing (est. 1972) is a Hudson Valley media company with its office at 322 Wall Street in Kingston. For more info on upcoming special sections, including how to place an ad, call (845) 334-8200, fax (845) 334-8202 or e-mail info@hudsonvalleyone.com.


PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

A few years ago, Roger scattered bulbs randomly around the yard, and planted them where they landed. This year they had become a delightfully free-spirited array throughout the lawn.

Some trees were planted, and others were removed. Rock paths and natural branches create boundaries. Time happens, and so does life. Patience is a perspective.

Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help.

#2 Trust

"Watching something grow is good for morale. It helps us believe in life," wrote Myron Kaufman.

Those arborvitae, along with every corner of the gardens that flowered this year, are a testimony to the idea that things mostly work out well. Roger and Tomoya were enjoying not only the benefits of their hard work -- which it was and continues to be -- but of their faith in the outcome.

Plant seeds and bulbs. Imagine the possibilities. Wait. Watch what happens. Be willing to trust in the good.

#3 Disappointment/humility

"There is no gardening without humility. Nature is constantly sending even its oldest scholars to the bottom of the class for some egregious blunder," said Alfred Austin

Kali Rosenblum has two very distinct Bearsville gardens. The garden in her

back yard is highly curated: "domesticated."

She began it with lots of enthusiasm and a very creative imagination when she and her husband bought their house many years ago. She experimented with interesting plants and beautiful flowers, which often thrived and sometimes didn't. It was disappointing to her to work and wait, to be attentive and caring, and to wait some more, only to see them wither.

She armed herself with questions. Answers were revealed. Sometimes the problem was location or soil. Sometimes

it seemed to be fate. Kali learned to live with the disappointment. In a garden, it is better to embrace disappointment and move on to more successful endeavors.

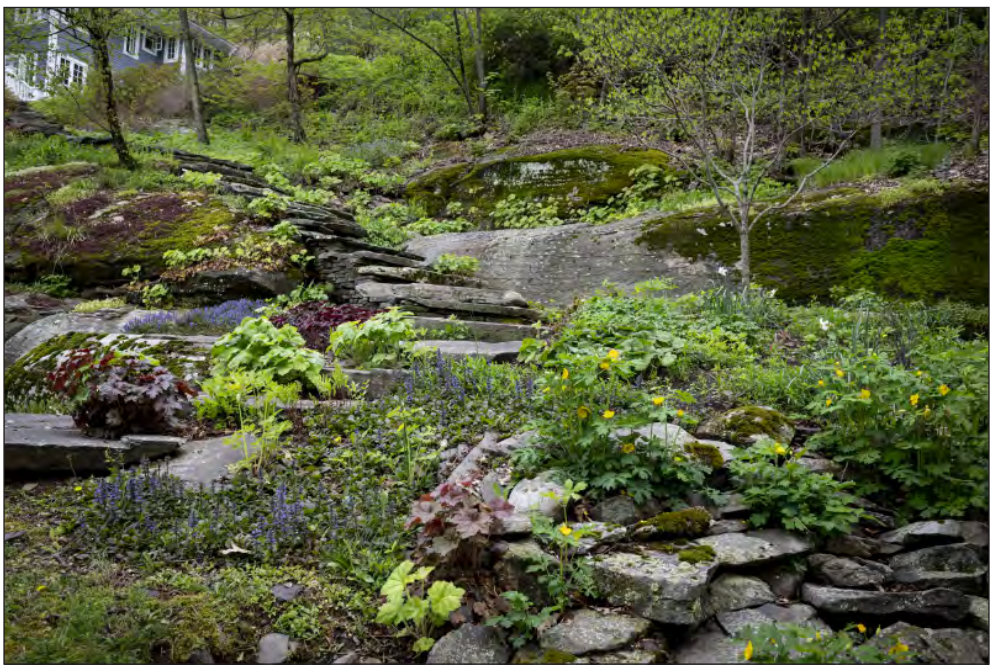
These days, Kali's labor has been mostly rewarded. From her cherry and crabapple trees to the potted tulips that spend winters wrapped up in the dark to burst forth in spring, to the exquisite ground cover that adorns the rock shelf that is an immovable part of her lawn, Kali has let those times of disappointment lead her to other lessons important to a dedicated gardener.

#4 Acceptance

Wisely said Doug Larsen, "A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows."

Kali's other garden, her woodland garden, was an experiment from the very start. Her interest in native plants derived from the disappointments she'd weathered in her back-yard arboretum. Research provided options that seemed ideal for the ecosystem already thriving behind her house and yard. Letting go is the biggest part of acceptance.

She planted Virginia bluebells and heuchera, among other things — amidst ferns and anemones — in the soil on the hill sloping away from her home. Now they are everywhere, growing out of rocks and in areas not adjacent at all to the stone steps they were supposed to frame. What hand was their guide? Wind? Water? Birds? God? It's a lovely and courageous chaos awaiting edits that you find in a garden like this, no matter how or why it happened.



PHOTOS BY DION OGUST

#5 Gratitude

"Isn't it enough that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it?" asked Douglas Adams.

There are life lessons in the garden, if one seeks them. It's a rewarding exercise for a thoughtful viewer. But do I always have to add something to appreciate its worth? Sometimes I know to be grateful that I can look — just look — and it's enough.

ROKOSZ MOST

A stegodile topiary found at Ireland Corners

Betting your hedges

With shears in hand, the gardener is the original autocrat.

by Rokosz Most

A hedgehog is to a hedge what a viper is to a viper pit. Only when one understands what a hedge really is can one then picture in the mind what sort of creature a hedgehog really is.

Consider the truth of the hedgerow, the truth of the cause of the hedgerow, the truth of the end of the hedgerow, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of the hedgerow. Then again consider the hedgerow.

At its most rudimentary, a hedge — tall or short, leafy and branch-firm, box-shaped and continuous – is never just one solitary shrub. It is a collection of individual shrubs brought into line.

A well-clipped hedge, then. is the product of a species of authoritarian mind.

More orderly walls is what the world needs.

A similar effect is gained by holding soldiers, ordered into rank and file, at attention, spiritually anticipating a command for parade rest that never comes. Squads become platoons and platoons become companies standing at attention, perfectly still, the individual frozen into conformity. A well-ordered hedge.

With shears in hand, the gardener is the original autocrat. Plants of the earth, do as thou art bidden.

ROKOSZ MOST

A book lizard topiary reading outside of Gardiner Library

The canon has it that hedges are the sound demonstration of good taste and well-bred restraint. Their possession and maintenance represents enlightened principles which shouldn't have to be explained, for explaining is vulgar. Correcting is fine. Not *pry-vussy*, darling, *prih-vissy*.

Opportunistic social climbers use hedges to improve their own prospects, slithering always upwardly through the sturdy scaffolding erected within and without. Living parasitically in order to climb to an undeserved reward, giving nothing in return for the sunlight which they have not earned and certainly don't deserve. If think thou must, think of the Great Gatsby's striving in West Egg.

Rip the vines out by the roots when they're young, or rue the way that has been prepared for them with compassion and progressiveness. Some plants are better than others. Vines in hedges result in an unkempt, trashy effect and ruins the put-together, well-maintained look a hedge owner should strive for. Keep striving.

What does your hedge say about you? No, really. What does it say?

Is it that you have hard and fast boundaries? That your home is a sanctuary and not a noisy brothel? So that conversations with houseguests can commence unimpeded, even breezes should be polite. A dense, tall hedge will drink up an inappropriate wind and diffuse it amongst its leaves or needles. Or thorns.

Despite its favor among the blue-blooded, a hedge may yet be a tool of subversion.

For those confronting the banal and tedious made flesh in the form of municipal restrictions regarding fence height, discover an ally in the cultivation of a hedge. There is no limit to the height a tree may grow and trees may also be combined hedge-wise, in this way, another exasperating example of the bureaucratic instinct to meddle and be praised can be ignored.

Like Alice, recite:

"How doth the little hedgehog smirk,
to see his leafy bower,
dripping nectar all night long,
regardless of the flower,

As useless regulations dim,
a satisfying flush arises,
with every petty tyrant gored,
we make do with our devices."

A hedge is all of these things and more. One can get lost in a veritable maze of hedgerows if one tries. Forsythia, burning bush, Arborvitae shrubs. And the Roman emperor of hedges, *Buxus Sempervirens*, known as boxwood.

But square or rectangular, stately hedgerows need not be the end-all, be-all.

Interrupted in her sunshine walk through the Rondout, Eugenie Dalland, writer and fashion eye, suggests that the hedge is not necessarily classist, but that it all lies instead in its function.

"Depends on how they're used, for sure," muses Dalland. "Because they can

certainly be used as a means of keeping someone out. I think it depends on the context and whose hedges they are. On the one hand, it has this probably pejorative social function, but then the other side is awesome autodidactic art. The person to ask would be my mom. She would make bushes and trees into the shape of rabbits and cats. She knows all about hedges."

Dalland recalls living as a child in a Brooklyn brownstone. Her mother had shaped a yew bush into a bunny rabbit. and a tree into a peacock.

Dalland's mother, Mimi Stafford, painter and candlelight enthusiaist. confirms her artistry.

"There was a little front garden near the steps," she says. "And on one side, there was a Japanese holly, which is an evergreen with very small leaves. Because it was a brownstone, the whole back of it backed up onto my neighbor, and it had been clipped straight so that it looked like half a tree. So I saw a peacock in it. And so I got a ladder out and started to clip it."

Underneath the peacock stood a yew.

"You know that book called *Goodnight Moon*? It's a children's book, but in it there's a rabbit. I used that rabbit as a model. And it's a rabbit upright. He walks, this rabbit. And then I cut him the same way. Maybe it took two summers or two growing seasons to get it right. And then all the kids would come, and, you know, suddenly they'd see a rabbit and you'd hear them exclaiming outside. So I always loved to cut topiary."

"Topiary" is the official word for the subversion of the stolidly composed hedge, composing with leaves expressions strange and surprising, familiar or fantastical, uncanny or unsettling, for purposes of concealment or ornamentation.

ROKOSZ MOST

A hedge is never just one shrub.

Stafford had heat pumps installed some years back. The decision was based on ethical considerations, but right away brought her aesthetic remorse.

"They're very unattractive inside and out," says Mimi, "And some of them are plopped right up against my garden. But you can surround them with a hedge. So I thought to do first a hedge of boxwood. I put these in a few years ago. And I wanted to cut the suits of the cards — spade, heart, diamond — but I think I'm going to have to take them out."

A plant may mildew. It may rust. It may suffer smut. Stafford's boxwood has been blighted, a sort of plant plague. The blight is killing the boxwood, says Stafford, and there's no cure for it.

For reference, picture in the mind's eye another variety of blight, that of the hemlock woolly adilgid, The blight resembles ash fallen from a nearby forest fire, settled over tree branches, in between the needles clumped up like snow. The specific blight affecting the

car care

boxwoods is not just in the Northeast. It has spread.

"Oh, no, it came up from the South," insists Stafford, "because all bad things, according to the Yankee mentality, have."

Stafford doesn't want to use a fungicide. Undoubtedly it's poison. To avoid the blight of the boxwood, Stafford considers her options.

"I'm looking at the Japanese holly that I made the peacock out of," she says. "And then inkberry holly is the other one I have my eyes on. There's also dwarf evergreen azalea. And yew. But the deer like it. That's the problem."

Down south in Gardiner, Keith Buesing, landscaper and topiary artist, swears still by boxwoods. "The variety I most use is a Winter Gem. and I've had pretty good luck with that," says Buesing.

Buesing is a well-regarded quantity in Gardiner for his skill in landscaping, as well as for his topiary deviance, his dramatic treatment of hedges, A few of his topiary offerings currently inhabit hillsides and adorn properties around town.

"At the front of the Gardner Library, there's a topiary lizard reading a book," says Buesing. "And there's another one at Ireland Corners. It's a much bigger sort of crocodilian type of a lizard. That one's slightly worse for wear, being in the place and position where it is. One of its hands have been run over but it's still pretty impressive."

The advantage of doing reptiles, Buesing says, is that they're low to the ground. A lizard can be built pretty quickly. Bigger plants for the body, smaller ones for the limbs. When you start out a little big, you can immediately trim your plant down to shape it up pretty well.

Born and raised into the nursery and landscaping business, Buesing has mastered an art that is an outgrowth of his experience with maintaining plants in general.

"They need to be trimmed, otherwise stuff will turn into a jungle," he says, "so if you're working on stuff and you're annually trimming something, you know, into a level hedge, or a sphere, or something like that, then after a while at least my mind started to say, Well, if I can make this shape, why not make some other shape? One thing leads to another, you know, and that's basically the progression there."

The big lizard on the hillside at Ireland Corners with the stegosaurus spikes on its back and the open mouth with teeth and tongue is shaped from English yew (*Taxus*).

Buesing confirms Stafford's observation. "The only problem with using it is that is that deer love *Taxus*," says Buesing.

"Have you ever heard of a guy named Earl Fryar?" asks Dalland. "He's incredible."

Revered master of abstract topiary in his South Carolina garden, Fryar ahapes, snips and shears bushes, shrubs and trees to be anything but representational.

Curved and slender, menacing and tilted, a concentric bowl fountain is stacked into a shape that defies simple explanation. The occasional dome or orb often tapers off into odd cotton-candy wisps or terraced arrangements.

Hundreds of topiaries live in Fryar's garden.

"He's a total autodidact," says Dalland. "He started on his own trimming the hedges in his back yard and turned them into works of art. I mean, you can't feature a hedge in a museum. But his work is recognized."

In the post-modern movement of topiary as in every post-modern movement, forms have been dispensed with as though formlessness was itself an inspired improvement. A dead end appears to have been reached in the maze of creation. Backtracking becomes necessary so that new combinations can be created. The initial offerings are indistinguishable from the efforts of an amateur, they say, only attempted with a master's eye.

As form returns, the combinations of the possible multiply.

Enter through a leafy doorway into a ceiling-less room with four stiff leafy walls. Sit in a leafy chair. Contemplate the clouds. Hang a painting. Decorate with topiary objects. Ornamental shrubs, clipped, trimmed, tied, dreams which look alive. They are alive.

"Oh, that's wonderful," says Stafford. "You could get all sorts of found objects and hang them on the walls."

After the flash of the post-modernist stab fades, the pendulum swings back to an appreciation for what has come before. Tradition. Convention, sturdy and solid. Let the trees and shrubs choose their shapes, amplify and augment what they

themselves want to do.

"People use them decoratively," says Staford. "I know one in New Orleans that I took a picture of that's in tiers. That gives it a French look. I mean, the French were big on topiary, but far more formal."

Stafford says French topiary is less playful than English. "A chess set outside and animals running across the lawn," says Stafford. "That's not too French."

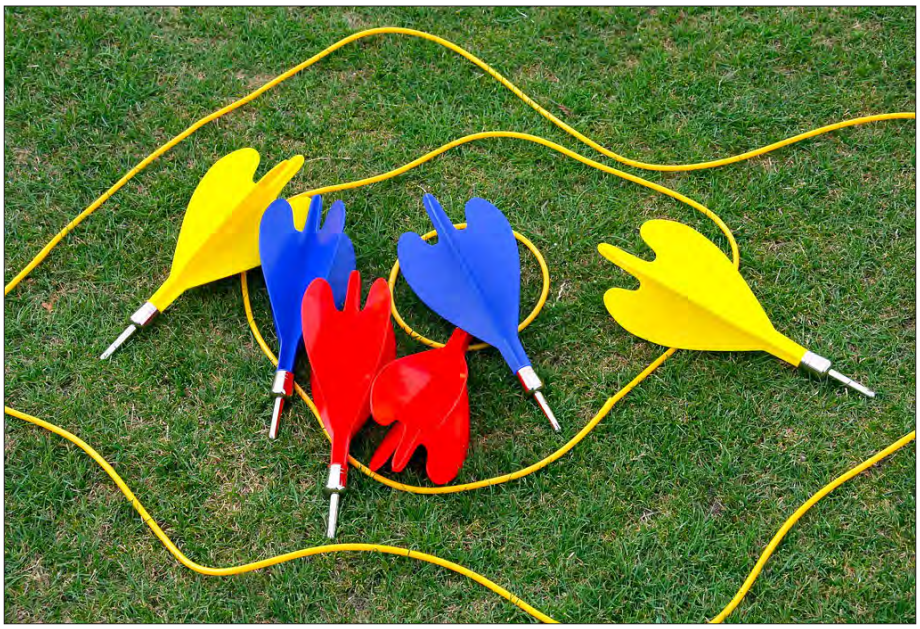
Towering spears taller than a house of what look like arborvitae border an old property on the intersection of Route 32 and Dewitt Mills Road, Impressive and beautiful, impenetrable and private, unmistakably aristocratic but totally functional, two built-up living hedges flank a stone stairway, A stone bench is nearby, but no water basin is in sight.

What *do* your hedges say about you?

Mow down the competition

Top ten lawn games for Hudson Valley back yards

by Zac Shaw



The potential to end up in the hospital made lawn darts even cooler to some kids.

Do you know where the grass is always greener? Under a lawn game.

Here in the Hudson Valley, our spacious back yards and abundant parks make it the perfect playground for outdoor fun. Lawn games are a fantastic way to enjoy the summer, and a treasured tradition in these parts. A Hudson Valley home is practically incomplete without a game to play in the yard.

In an age dominated by screen time, lawn games are the perfect antidote. They keep people engaged and bring friends and family together in a way that social media just can't compete with. So get ready to ditch the devices and dive into some real-world fun with our roundup of the top ten lawn games for Hudson Valley summers.

We've broken our top ten picks down into three categories below: Toss and aim games, net and ball games, and precision and strategy games.

Toss and aim games

Bocce ball

With origins in ancient Rome, bocce ball has been a beloved pastime for centuries. This Italian classic spread throughout Europe and eventually made its way to America. You'll find the highest concentration of bocce-ball players if you connect with the area's Italian culture organizations such as the Italian Center of Poughkeepsie or the Ulster County Italian-American Foundation — but you also don't have to leave your back yard to enjoy this simple and satisfying lawn game. It's actually making a comeback, with more Google searches about the game every year since the search engine began.

Playing with eight large balls (four per

team) and a smaller target ball called the pallino, players take turns tossing their balls, aiming to get as close to the pallino as possible. Points are awarded based on proximity to the pallino, and the first team to reach a predetermined score, usually 12 or 16, wins.

Whether you're a seasoned player or a newbie, bocce offers a perfect blend of strategy and relaxation. It's simple and accessible, requiring minimal equipment. It's an ideal game for a sunny afternoon in the Hudson Valley, bringing together friends and family for fun and friendly competition.

Horseshoes

The Hudson Valley has a historical connection to the game of horseshoes. Our area has been a hub of horseshoe pitching activity, particularly during the early and mid-20th century. Numerous horseshoe tournaments and events have been hosted here, and you may still find a league or two if you look hard enough (the National Horseshoe Pitchers Association is a good place to start).

Of course, the game of horseshoes is also tied to our rural and recreational culture. Not to mention that when HITS comes to Saugerties, you should have no trouble finding game pieces.

All you need to play is one horse worth of horseshoes (four to be exact) and two stakes set 40 feet apart. Players take turns

Bocce ball has its origins in Italy.

tossing horseshoes, aiming to encircle the stake or land as close to it as possible. A "ringer" (a horseshoe encircling the stake) scores three points, while a horseshoe within six inches of the stake scores one point. The first player or team to reach 21 points wins.

Fun fact if you want to impress at your next backyard horseshoe match: In competitive play, the "cancellation scoring" method is often used. In this method, opposing ringers cancel each other out. For example, if both players throw a ringer, no points are awarded for those ringers. The closest remaining horseshoe(s) to the stake would then determine the score for that inning.

Cornhole

Legend has it that a 14th-century German cabinet maker named Matthias Kuepermann invented this popular back yard game after seeing kids tossing rocks into holes. How's that for inspiration? Fast forward to today, and it's a staple at summer gatherings across the Hudson Valley and the entire country. Chances are you already are familiar with the game, which seems omnipresent in our area at backyard barbecues, outdoor festivals, microbreweries and roadside eateries.

Cornhole's rules and scoring are almost identical to horseshoes, just with holes instead of stakes and bean bags instead of U-shaped metal. The game involves two boards with a hole near the top, set 27 feet apart (you needn't get out the tape measure for a casual backyard game). Players take turns throwing bean bags, aiming to get them in the hole (three points) or on the board (one point) in a race to score 21 points.

Lawn darts

How did the act of tossing large, sharp metal darts into the air become an American pastime in the 1970s and 1980s? Blame it on aggressive marketing and the capitalistic drive to profit above all else — even if it meant children were regularly ending up in the hospital. It wasn't until 1988 that the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issued a warning on the potential dangers of lawn darts. This perhaps made them even cooler to some kids, and they kept ending up in the emergency room, which led to the CPSC banning pointy metal lawn darts the following year.

Today, the game is a pale shadow of its danger-tinged yesteryears (you can still find pointy metal-tipped lawn darts if you search online, but you didn't hear that from me). That doesn't mean the pastime has lost all its magic. The new and totally safe version of the game is played the same way as the weaponized one, but the darts just kind of flop onto the lawn versus streaking down from the heavens and piercing the earth — well, hopefully just the earth.

The objective is to land the darts inside the target ring, with points awarded based on accuracy — traditionally three points for a dart inside the ring and one point for the closest dart outside the ring. The first to reach 21 points wins.

Net and ball games

Badminton

Badminton sounds like the name of a British castle, but it traces back to ancient civilizations in Greece, China, and India. It evolved from a game called "battledore and shuttlecock" (catchy) before taking its modern form in 19th-century England.

Most of us have played this one in our school gym class or at a back-yard summer party. The only equipment needed are two to four lightweight rackets, a net and a shuttlecock (if you're prudish you can call it a birdie). The game can be played singles or doubles, with players standing on opposite sides of a net. The objective is to hit the shuttlecock over the net, aiming to land it within the opponent's court. A point is scored when the shuttlecock hits the ground on the opponent's side, and the first to reach 21 points wins the game.

This is an easy one to set up anywhere,

and requires just enough skill to be challenging, but not so much that it's inaccessible. It's also very hard to take the game seriously as the shuttlecock moves in unpredictable ways, resulting in a lot of flailing about, making it perfect for those who are less competitive in nature.

Volleyball

Volleyball, invented just down the road in Massachusetts by William G. Morgan in 1895, is an American institution. Again, most people have played this one in gym class. All it takes is one net, one ball, and two teams (officially six players each, but you can manage with less or more).

The objective is to hit the ball over the net to land on the opponent's side while preventing it from touching the ground on your side. Teams score points through rallies, with the first to 25 points winning the set. Players rotatAe positions, can touch the ball up to three times per side, and must avoid net violations.

While you can set up a volleyball net in your back yard, many folks in the Hudson Valley find it easier to head to local parks where nets are already installed. Kingston Point, with its beachside volleyball courts, is a prime spot for a game.

Spikeball

Spikeball, a relatively new game, was invented in 1989 by Jeff Knurek and has surged in popularity in recent years, especially among young adults. Combining elements of volleyball and foursquare (aka 'boxball'), it's fast-paced and highly engaging.

The game is played with a small round net placed at ankle height and a bouncy ball. Two teams of two players each stand around the net. The objective is to hit the ball onto the net so that the opposing team cannot return it. Each team has up to three hits to return the ball, and points are scored when the other team fails to return it. The first team to reach 21 points wins.

Spikeball requires minimal equipment — a net and a ball — and can be set up almost anywhere, making it a perfect choice for back yards or parks in the Hudson Valley. Its high-energy nature and quick reflex demands appeal to competitive spirits and those looking for a fun, intense workout. It's a fantastic way to get moving and enjoy the outdoors with friends and family.

Precision and strategy games

Croquet

Many of us were first exposed to croquet through Alice in Wonderland, but I can assure you that no flamingos or hedgehogs are harmed in an actual game of croquet.

Croquet is truly a classic lawn game, with roots in 19th-century England, where it was first popularized by British aristocrats as a leisurely outdoor pastime. It became so popular that the 1900 Summer Olympics featured it as a sport (France won).

The game is played with wooden or plastic mallets, balls, and wickets (hoops). Players take turns using their mallets to hit their balls through a series of wickets arranged in a specific pattern on the lawn. The objective is to navigate the course and hit a finishing stake before your opponents. Points are scored by successfully passing through wickets and hitting the stake.

Younger players will enjoy a more freestyle experience, laying out wickets willy-nilly to create a more interesting course to navigate versus the staid pattern of the official version. It's the quickest way to turn your back yard into something resembling a mini golf course — except with tiny sledgehammers as clubs and no need to dig holes in your yard.

Disc golf

Speaking of golf, have you tried the disc variety? Disc golf has boomed in popularity over the last decade. It's far more accessible and far less expensive than normal golf, but you get the same enjoyment of nature and the outdoors, and a similar challenge in developing skills, strategies, range-finding abilities and throwing techniques. It plays just like golf, except you're throwing discs at metal baskets on poles with hanging chains to catch the disc (and make a satisfying 'ching' sound).

The Hudson Valley boasts some fantastic disc golf courses. A top three might include the hilly and scenic 18-hole course at Hunter Mountain, the diverse and picturesque Beacon Glades disc golf course, and the challenging, heavily wooded Gunks disc golf course. Warwick Town Park disc golf course, though a bit farther away, is a favorite among many local players. Don't miss Kingston Point's nine-hole course, either. While simple, it offers cool features and beautiful views.

Stump

For a game so simple, stump hits the nail on the head when it comes to having fun with friends in the back yard. Also known as Hammerschlagen, stump originated in German beer gardens and has become a popular lawn game in the U.S. The game involves a tree stump, nails, and a hammer. Players take turns trying to drive their nail into the stump with a single swing. The catch? You have to use the pointed end of the hammer to drive the nail.

basic rules are simple. Each player's nail starts partially hammered into the stump. Players stand around the stump, taking turns striking their nail with one swift, controlled motion. The first to fully hammer in their nail wins.

What could be more Hudson Valley than having a raucous good time while standing around a piece of wood? That's our element!