

# High Country *Haven*

Flowers tumble down the mountain  
in this secluded Blue Ridge garden.  
Waves of color adorn the slopes for  
months, all according to plan

BY STEVE BENDER PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROGER FOLEY

Blue hydrangeas,  
pink phlox, red  
daylilies, and  
golden black-eyed  
Susans are  
dazzling at the  
peak of color.



You can't always read a human face, but you know when a flower is content. Roots explore the moistened earth, forming rookeries of sprouting stems and leaves. Unblemished foliage glistens. Sturdy bloom stalks salute the sun. Pigments paint the petals.

Rest your eyes on this blissfully content garden in the mountains near Mount Airy, North Carolina. Jubilant flowers reign supreme. Not even a square inch surrenders to grass. Created by garden designer Troy Rhone of Birmingham and landscape architect Chip Callaway of Greensboro, North Carolina, the garden gracefully flows around two summer homes. Stone steps and walks descend the hillside, linking terraces stuffed with flowers and lending the garden some year-round structure.

A boisterous celebration of nonstop blooms marks the weeks between late spring and Labor Day. At first glance, flowers of varying sizes, shapes, and colors show no more discipline than a kindergarten class. Hydrangeas, summer phlox, daisies, lilies, black-eyed Susans, and Queen Anne's lace test boundaries, forget rules, and jostle for attention. In reality, however, the magnificent displays result from careful planning. Four factors are key to their appeal.



Orange helenium is good for cutting.



The colors used on this screened porch reflect those found in the garden, bridging indoors and out.



Flowers are planted so adjacent hues complement each other. Grass isn't welcome. Vigorous perennials take up every inch.



Japanese painted fern and hydrangea

**Climate** || People aren't the only ones who appreciate the cooler summer temperatures of high elevations. So do plants such as peonies, dahlias, delphiniums, and hollyhocks. Especially important are night temperatures dropping into the 50s, because they allow flowers and shrubs to rest from the previous day. Even heat lovers—daylilies, hydrangeas, and summer phlox—get a lift. They bloom longer and more heavily and flaunt deeper colors. Yes, the growing season is shorter up here, but it's also more concentrated.

**Cutting** || "I love keeping cut flowers in the house all the time," states the homeowner. Therefore, nearly every plant in the garden—whether annual, perennial, bulb, or shrub—produces blossoms great for cutting. Most are long bloomers, too, meaning that each day offers more bounty. Examples include zinnias, hydrangeas, Shasta daisies, crocosmias, heleniums, liatris, lilies, dahlias, black-eyed Susans, and summer phlox.

*“This garden does have a mind of its own, but we get along just fine.”*

Anchored by stone paths and terraces, stunning planting beds stairstep down the slope.



This view stretches to the mountains of Virginia, capturing the magnificence of nature's garden.



**Color Sweeps** || Though self-sowing flowers such as Queen Anne's lace come up everywhere, most plants confine themselves to loose sweeps of particular colors. This ensures that adjacent colors complement one another rather than compete. "We grouped all the yellows together, all the whites together, all the blues and purples together, and all the pinks together," Troy explains. "We didn't want red flowers blooming next to pinks." Reds and pinks can clash; reds and purples don't. Whites and blues play well with everybody.

**Continuity** || "A garden changes all the time. It's never the same," notes the owner. Yet this garden retains its overall color scheme by ensuring that flowers going out of bloom are succeeded by others of the same color. This principle also applies when plants are removed because they die or become overcrowded. "When I take out pink phlox," says the owner, "I try to put in something else pink."

If the beneficent mountain climate has a drawback, it's that most plants here like it a little too well. "Stuff just grows like crazy," declares an awestruck Troy. Regular dividing of perennials is an absolute must, lest plants lose vigor or take over. Seedlings that emerge out of place need pulling. Yet such tasks aren't burdensome, concedes the owner, not when scenes like these surround you in summer. "This garden does have a mind of its own," she says, adding, "but we get along just fine." [SL](#)

### Keep the Colors Coming

Use this handy chart to plan a succession of colors throughout the growing season.

EARLY	MIDSEASON	LATE
<b>BLUE/PURPLE</b>		
bearded iris, blue phlox, delphinium	hydrangea, balloon flower, summer phlox	aster, blue mist, Mexican bush sage
<b>RED/ORANGE</b>		
poppy, wild columbine, camellia	helenium, bee balm, crocosmia	pineapple sage, zinnia, dahlia
<b>YELLOW</b>		
daffodil, pansy, forsythia	fernleaf yarrow, black-eyed Susan, daylily	goldenrod, sunflower, dahlia
<b>PINK</b>		
bleeding heart, flowering quince, larkspur	liatris, purple coneflower, obedient plant	aster, 'Ryan's Pink' mum, cosmos
<b>WHITE</b>		
snowflake, peony, spiraea, clematis	Shasta daisy, lily, Queen Anne's lace	ginger lily, Japanese anemone, angel's trumpet