

W O N D E R L A N D

IN TURNER, A FORMER
NURSERY OWNER MIXES
UNUSUAL PLANTS ON
A MASSIVE BLOOMING
"CANVAS."

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Herb and perennial gardens flourish near the entrance to Edith and Joel Ellis's 19th-century Turner home.



OPPOSITE Edith's favorite Loreley intermediate bearded iris in full bloom. **THIS PAGE FROM LEFT** A mossy brick path leads to a former nursery shop nestled among apple trees, geraniums, rose champions, salvia Ballerina Pink, yellow sedum Angelina, pink spiraea, and Navy Lady roses. Jimmie (full name Jimmie Hendrix) relaxes on a preferred bench.



TIP
BEARDED IRISES NEED WELL-DRAINED SOIL AND FULL SUN. LEAVE THE RHIZOME TOPS UNCOVERED TO GIVE THEM A "SUN BATH."



Beds of hot-pink geranium sanguineum, purple Fabian and yellow Coronation irises, and silver lamb's ear bordering a gravel drive welcome visitors to Edith and Joel Ellis's home and garden in Turner. Set at the top of a verdant hill with a ¼-acre garden below, the house is nearly as varied as the landscaping, incorporating three connected 19th-century buildings — an 1815 three-quarter Cape, an 1840 Federal, and a Greek Revival, circa 1850–1865 — rendered in violet-gray paint. An attached carriage house, which the Ellises rebuilt with the same fenestration as the Greek Revival, completes the visually harmonious grouping.

Edith, who grew up in a Turner farmhouse, has loved plants since she was a little girl helping her mother tend a cottage garden that included the same Fabian irises that she now raises. After her own children were grown, she earned a horticulture degree from Southern Maine Community College. She went on to teach "Herbaceous 101" at SMCC and serve as executive director of the Maine Landscape & Nursery Association.

In 1990, she opened Sunnyside Gardens, a nursery specializing in plants that were hard to find locally. Gesturing

toward the garden, lush with freeform beds of conifers, dwarf beech and apple trees, hydrangeas, and peonies, she explains, "I had the nursery here because I wanted clients to see plants in a real garden." Three years ago, desiring more time to dig in the dirt, she downsized to a Facebook Marketplace account. "It's perfect!" she says with a laugh. "I earn enough to support my plant habit and I still get to talk with clients."

The garden is a series of discrete spaces that reveal themselves as one strolls down the slope. Linked by grassy, brick, and wood-chip paths, the areas are distinguished by landmarks: a grove of sumacs, a boxwood topiary chicken, or a climbing hydrangea scrambling up a black locust tree.

Stone urns brimming with rosemary and bay leaf anchor an herb garden near the house. Beyond, astilboides and Solomon's Seal flourish beneath the sumacs. Lemon Lime hostas — one

TIP
 TO ENSURE IRISES
 THRIVE, DIVIDE THEM
 EVERY THREE TO FOUR
 YEARS, ABOUT SIX
 WEEKS AFTER THEY
 BLOOM.



of many varieties that thrive in the garden's dappled shade — surround a small reflecting pool Edith created from hypertufa, a type of artificial stone. Other hosta favorites include Clifford's Forest Fire, Fortunai Aureomarginata, Liberty, and Sure Heart. Farther down the rise, viburnum drapes over a metal allée built by Joel — “my essential right-hand man,” Edith says. Joel also crafted a cedar pergola that shelters a rope hammock. Concord grape vines trail across its roof, while Hyde Hall clematis and Torch Song peonies offer privacy.

The center of the garden, which once held potted plants for sale, has been transformed by the Ellises' son Jeremy into a stone firepit partially ringed with a dry-stone wall. A horse chestnut, grown from seed that Edith collected at Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum, towers near a wooden shed that was once the nursery shop. At the far edge of the garden, a blue-and-purple playhouse, built 20 years ago for the Ellises' granddaughter, peeks out from a maple grove.

“Gardening is my art form,” says Edith, who finds endless inspiration in the hours she spends among the plants each day. “I love growing unusual varieties, and using them to combine colors, textures, and forms on a very large canvas. It's a delight when it all comes together, and a double delight when I can share it with visitors.” □



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP
 Beta grapes (a Carver-Concord hybrid) and Hyde Hall clematis cover a pergola built by Joel; the dark leaves of weeping purple beech color the foreground. Antique bearded iris Flora Zenor, a 1940s favorite of Edith's mother, blooms beside Russian sage, lamb's ears, pink dianthus, and yellow sedums at the garden entrance.

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP
 Edith tends to an exuberant bed of her beloved Loreley irises. Sempervivum Cherry Berry grows happily in a metal watering can that lost its base.

