

# MARTHA STEWART Living

*Plus*  
THE KEY  
TO A  
CLEAN  
HOUSE

## Magic in the Making Joyful Ways to Elevate How You Live

SOURDOUGH  
WITH A PRO

MARTHA'S  
HOME REFRESH

SIMPLE SHEET-PAN  
SUPPERS





# WESTERN *Wonder*

When a couple moved to a rugged ridge above Santa Fe, New Mexico, nearly a decade ago, they wanted a full-fledged garden, despite the area's extreme weather swings. Working with a local firm that specializes in native plants and sustainability, they created a colorful expanse that provides soft textures, vivid surprises, and a strong connection to the vast landscape surrounding them.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAITLIN ATKINSON  
TEXT BY JENNIFER JEWELL



## PURPLE MAJESTY

A flourishing border delivers a graceful transition from the formal courtyards near Mark and Karen Still's home to their free-spirited wildflower meadow on the far side of the path. It overflows with long-season bloomers, like terra-cotta yarrow (*Achillea millefolium* 'Terra Cotta'), Korean feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis brachytricha*), globe thistle (*Echinops ritro*), spires of *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune', and purple cone-flower (*Echinacea purpurea*).





**T**HE HIGH DESERT north of Santa Fe has an ancient and austere beauty, marked by deep valleys, stark mountains, and stunning mesas. Since 2012, Karen and Marc Still have made their home there, on the Tano Point bluff, encircled by incredible views. The Sangre de Cristo and Jemez mountain ranges lie to the east and west; the New Mexico badlands stretch to the north; and at night, the lights of Santa Fe twinkle to the south. It's a big place to live, dramatic and awe-inspiring.

Karen, an interior designer, and Marc, an investment banker, met and fell in love in Dallas. The hitch? Karen was moving to Santa Fe. Marc wisely followed his heart, and they soon relocated to a breathtaking property they found together. They married in the small chapel on their land, then spent the first five years renovating their midcentury Pueblo Revival-style house, which was designed by the late architect John Gaw Meem. Karen, a life-long gardener, started a vegetable plot and orchard in those early days, then turned to the larger expanse. She wanted a bold landscape that would complement, not compete with, the surroundings. "A house is not a home without a garden to ground you," she says.

In 2017, the Stills hired landscape architect Kenneth Francis, a partner at the multidisciplinary design firm Surroundings Studios, known for sustainability and a rich understanding of the region's water challenges. With his colleague, native-plant expert Joseph Charles, he drafted a plan featuring perennial borders, courtyards, and a wildflower meadow.

"Our mission was for the meadow to be a showstopper," says Francis. But it also had to be tough. Temperatures can plummet 40 degrees from day to night in summer. Monsoons gush then, too, while precipitation tapers in late winter. And winds often surpass 60 miles per hour in spring. Contractors from El Toro Landscape began installation in 2017, before the July rains. To create distinct waves of color, they dug in one-to-five-gallon pots of hardy perennials, then scattered native grasses and wildflower seeds. The first three years



after planting required irrigation and vigilant weeding to remove invasive species, but now the area is remarkably hands-off: A smart drip-watering system turns on only during dry spells.

Today, the meadow ripples from the house and down the southern slope toward the valley, evolving from the cool purples and pinks of *Agastache* and coneflowers to the warmer hues of blanketflower, coreopsis, and feathery giant sacaton grass, all of it thrumming with pollinators. "When the sun hits those wildflowers in the afternoon, it's magical," says Karen. "Everything is in intense focus: the colors, the forms, the shadows. You feel everything that's been there before you."

## A SILVER PALETTE

The couple wanted the formal courtyards outside their home to be cooling and calming. Under a native piñon pine, landscapers planted low-growing *Teucrium aroanum* and fuzzy lamb's ear (*Stachys byzantina*), as well as taller, lavender-blooming *Salvia officinalis*; violet-flowering *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant'; and wheat-colored seed heads of Korean feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis brachytricha*). Clay oil pots are filled with Karl Foerster feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster') and purple potato vine (*Ipomoea*).



## SUPER GREENS

Set on a sheltered southeastern slope, Karen's kitchen garden serves as her playground and her pantry. "It is wild and sprawling, carefree and gorgeous," she says of her sustainable and highly productive plot, which overflows with herbs, beans, tomatoes, and peppers. It's also home to 20 chickens, which eat scraps and provide manure (along with delicious eggs). Karen starts seeds indoors in winter and plants them in the ground in June (except for peas, which she sows every March). She also hand-scatters flower and some vegetable seeds, "leaving things where they want to be." Come summer, corn, sunflowers, squashes, hollyhocks, and herbs happily intertwine.





## LIKE A RAINBOW

In 2017, contractors seeded the meadow with a native wildflower mix from Santa Fe's Plants of the Southwest that includes yellow *Coreopsis* sp., Mexican hat (*Ratibida* sp.), and blanketflower (*Gaillardia* sp.), and supplemented it with larger specimens such as giant sacaton grass (*Sporobolus wrightii*), *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune', allium, and purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). In the background stands a regal native piñon pine. In midwinter, after birds have nibbled up the seed heads, landscapers cut back the meadow, leaving the grasses to play in the wind and low light before everything starts growing again in spring. To read more about this garden and many others, check out *Under Western Skies: Visionary Gardens From the Rockies to the Pacific*, by Caitlin Atkinson and Jennifer Jewell (Timber Press), coming this April.





