



# Inspiration from *Across the Pond*

Welcome to Thistledown Gardens, where the English ‘accent’ is charming

BY MEGAN SWOYER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN MACONOCHE  
STYLED BY JOSH CLARK



**Y**ou’ll find nothing but British classics at Brad Stanwick and Matt Anstett’s Pleasant Ridge home. Over the past few years, interior designer John Rattray, of Ferndale-based Craighall Interiors ([craighallinteriors.com](http://craighallinteriors.com)), has been working to completely remodel many rooms in the 1912 historic bungalow the men refer to as Thistledown.

Stanwick says he’s always loved English history, movies, and furniture. As a student of

art history, he focused on decorative arts — English, in particular. But when he and Anstett purchased the home, they decided to work on the landscaping first. “There was so much to do inside and out, but we wanted to get the gardens growing so we could enjoy them soon. We went step-by-step,” Anstett says.

One look at their gardens and terrace and you’ll be wondering if you’ve been transported to a quaint, centuries-old village in England. And while guests are enjoying a spot of English Breakfast tea or a pint of lager sitting beneath the maple canopy, they’ll also bask in the gardens’ many traditional elements. “There’s a heavy overtone of the English aesthetic, something both myself and the homeowners are very drawn to,” Rattray says.

#### CHEERIO!

Above: After cutting flowers, a spot of English Breakfast tea or a pint of lager can be enjoyed amid what looks like a centuries-old terrace.



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**HEDGE FUN**

Above, left and right: Low-growing broadleaf boxwood adorn the beautiful grounds. “We don’t maintain those ourselves,” Matt Anstett says, “but we hire someone to trim them with a flat top and angled sides, so the lower branches will get the sun.”

## Here are 20 insights, tips, and tidbits for creating European-style enchantment

**1. NEIGHBORLY**

Farmington-based landscape architect John Lindsay Mayer ([jlmlandscapearchitect.com](http://jlmlandscapearchitect.com)) drew up the original garden layout nearly 20 years ago. “He was doing phenomenal work in the neighborhood,” Stanwick says. “He understood the English look, and we wanted something with koi and fish, and he came up with that design, too.”

**2. PRETTY POTS**

Stanwick and Anstett run The Parson’s Nose Antiques ([theparsonsnoseantiques.com](http://theparsonsnoseantiques.com)) in Oak Park. As importers of English antiques, the couple often travels to England on buying trips. Beyond interior furnishings and accessories, they sell antique garden ornaments such as bird baths, sculptures, and pottery. “I have an obsession with hand-thrown terracotta pots and Victorian ones,” Stanwick says. And terracotta pots, as it turns out, are the perfect containers for showcasing his other obsession: geraniums. “I love the ones with the chartreuse leaves and pink flowers,” he says. Some of the couple’s favorites are Queen of Persia, Mrs. Cox, and Vancouver Centennial.

**3. WHAT’S IN A NAME**

Stanwick and Anstett named their home “Thistle-down.” It’s said that British homeowners sometimes named their abodes after places they enjoyed visiting, or used a name to describe the building’s original use. “When we moved in, the gardens were overtaken by thistles, they were everywhere! They have a downy seed. That’s where the name comes from,” Stanwick says.

**4. BEAUTIFUL BOXWOOD**

The couple’s 300 boxwood plants — low-growing broadleaf evergreens with small, rounded leaves — are reminiscent of the manicured gardens of England, and their topiary and trimmed hedges. “We don’t maintain those ourselves,” Anstett says, “but we hire someone to trim them like a pyramid with a flat top and angled sides, so the lower branches will get the sun.”

**5. GOOD FOR YEWE!**

A row of English yews grows along the back of the yard. “We have someone trim those, as well,” Anstett says. “The structure of the boxwood and yews is softened by the gardens, so we have formal and informal.” (English yews, incidentally, have a fascinating history; Yew wood was used for the longbows of English archers and is still used today for making bows and cabinetwork.)

**6. A SMASHING VARIETY!**

“Coneflowers, roses, and Annabelle hydrangeas go wild back there, tumbling over the pathways,” Stanwick shares.

**7. A CUT ABOVE**

The cutting garden brims with zinnias, bells of Ireland, cosmos, snapdragons, and coneflowers. “It’s a rainbow of color,” Anstett says.

**8. GENERATIONAL GARDENING**

Stanwick’s grandmother inspired him to grow a green thumb. “My grandma was a gardener and got me started young,” he says. “She and I were always out.” Anstett says he has learned a lot about the good earth from Stanwick.

**9. REVEALING THEIR SOURCES**

The men purchase plants from a few nurseries, including Telly’s Greenhouse and Garden Center in Troy, and Ray Wiegand’s Nursery in Macomb.

**10. CLIMB THE WALLS**

John Evans climbing roses are “insane” come June, Anstett boasts. “They’re very cold-hardy, and what you think of when thinking of an English climbing rose.”





### 11. A ROOM FOR BLOOMS

A multipurpose flower room that's "kind of like a mudroom or boot room," Stanwick says, is an extension of the kitchen and is a perfect spot for cleaning vegetables and trimming flowers from the garden. With a soapstone sink (great for accommodating not only harvest washes, but also a handy bathing spot for their small dogs) and garden shears, it's easy to create instant bouquets for indoors. Hand-painted cabinetry by Dave Lefleur, painted on-site (as would have been done in the 'teens and '20s," designer Rattray says), is by Troy-based John Morgan of Perspectives Cabinetry ([perspectivescabinetry.com](http://perspectivescabinetry.com)).

### 12. CALM AND COY

The men installed much of the koi pond themselves, and learned about digging a pond, liner installation, piping, aeration, and filtration. "As we were filling it up, we had a pool party," Stanwick recalls, laughing. Many of their original koi fish — in vibrant colors like white, black, orange, and yellow — are still with them. "It's very calming," Stanwick says of the pond.

### 13. GETTING SAUCY

Some of the heirloom tomatoes the men grow include Mortgage Lifter, Cherokee Purple, and Cosmonaut Volkov. "We always have an overabundance and make our own tomato sauce in early autumn," Stanwick says.

### 14. VERY V

Classic, vertical V-groove walls adorn the flower room. (V-groove planks are wider and have chamfered edges that fit together with a tongue-and-groove joint. They also look wider than beadboard cladding and have a V-shape between the boards.) "This space was an old porch. We wanted it to feel like a cocoon," Rattray says, "and use the least amount of drywall we could so it feels really original and is more durable. The room gets a lot of use; we're in



### ROOMS WITH A VIEW

Both pages: A multipurpose flower room comes in handy for everything from cleaning the garden's harvest to arranging flowers. A more intimate seating area is welcoming. Note the decomposed granite ground cover, which "has a great sound when you walk on it," Anstett says.

the garden every day." Bluestone flooring stands up to muddy and snowy boots and "can get beat up, like those in an old country house."

### 15. GRANITE CITY

Decomposed granite (from the Rock Shop in Plymouth) is underfoot in many areas. "We decided against pea gravel because it's rounded, and you sink into it when you walk. The granite interlocks more when compacted, and forms a good surface. And it has a great sound when you walk on it," Anstett says.

### 16. PATIO PLEASURES

"The Japanese maples around the patio provide a canopy, so you don't need an umbrella when sitting on the patio," Anstett says.

### 17. BIRD'S THE WORD

"It's like we're in the country here; we've got woodpeckers, hummingbirds, Baltimore orioles, and owls," Stanwick says.

### 18. AN-TEAK-Y

A Chippendale-inspired teak dining set from Restoration Hardware works well for parties, says designer Rattray, who specifically ordered those pieces. "It looks like what would be in an English garden," he says. "I told them 'You have to get this,' and 'I bet they'll discontinue it in the next year.' Sure enough, they purchased the set and it did discontinue. It's held up really well. Teak, when outdoors, gets a nice silvery-gray patina." Rattray also assisted with the placement of existing European garden sculptures and other teak furnishings.

### 19. REPRO RESPECT

Anstett removed an original window near the door that leads to the backyard and shipped it to a millwork company that specializes in historic reproduction. "They used old-growth wood and antique glass to make the 'new' windows. Same with the door, which had to be replaced," Rattray explains. Rocky Mountain hardware on the door complements the look. "The attention to historic detail makes it all the more special," he says.

### 20. KEEP IT GOING

Even though the yard looks highly manicured, the men always leave dead branches in trees, and never cut back their perennials in the fall. "They have seedheads that the birds need during wintertime. We do a spring clean-up for these items, rather than a fall clean-up. We're so happy to provide the habitat," Stanwick says. ♦