

Growing inspiration

By Leigh Patterson



Regular visitors to St. Mary's Nursery & Garden Centre Ltd. may have had to do a double-take recently. A row of evergreens once viewed from the entranceway has disappeared, revealing an attractive and welcoming blend of hardscaping, plantings and design style elements that showcase the myriad landscaping products and services available at St. Mary's.

According to St. Mary's co-owner Carla Hrycyna, the ongoing project began last summer and was developed in co-ordination with Barkman Concrete as part of the popular "Build with Barkman" series offered at St. Mary's. Held once a year (the next course is being offered on June 26), these are small,

one-day classes that give homeowners a chance to do hands-on work using various products and help build a project "from the ground up," thereby building their DIY confidence at the same time.

"These projects help people understand how something is done on a large scale, and what they can achieve with different materials, whether precast concrete, natural boulders or tumbled stone," says Hrycyna, who adds that St. Mary's carries and installs Barkman Concrete products.

On a rare sunny day last summer, 15 participants helped build this showpiece project on a pre-prepped site, which takes advantage of existing natural features. The design by Miles Duncan came to life under the guidance of St. Mary's foremen Andre, Dean and Jourdain (who together have more than 90 years of combined experience), their crews and Barkman staff.

A precast "Roman" paver circle kit was used to form the large patio that then radiates outward to a low curved retaining wall on one side. The wall, built to a height that provides additional seating, features Roman stack stone and is anchored by a rustic pillar of "Belvedere" stone

topped by a chiselled capstone. Behind the wall, a row of "Centre Glow" ninebark shrubs define and soften the hardscaping, while large limestone boulders help make the transition to the natural rough-edged river rock beds that are planted with spirea and gracefully shaded by a Japanese tree lilac.

A gentle riser of rugged "Rosetta" stone topped with sharp granite defines the rest of the space. The deep crevices created between the stones act as planting pockets, where ferns and sedum could be added to further soften the stone-work. Anchored in the large central planting bed, an upright "Blue Arrow" juniper adds a regal Mediterranean look and with its compact linear form, creates a strong juxtaposition to the surrounding horizontal lines.





Participants also created the pathway guiding visitors around the site. Crushed granite filings were layered over top of a limestone gravel base, making for an aesthetically pleasing option that blends more naturally with the surroundings.

Behind the large patio is a park-like setting where a number of mature Manchurian ash trees were underplanted with a hosta bed, and where a meandering dry creek bed serves to catch water in this low lying area.

"This technique is especially effective in newer home developments, where inconsistent elevation between houses causes drainage issues. It's an attractive and functional design style that can be created between two neighbours as a solution," Hrycyna notes.



At the centre of this multifunctional display space is a raised firepit. "Today's yards are extensions of our homes," Hrycyna says. "Elements like firepits help bring that cozy, homey feeling outdoors and give us another place to make memories," she adds.

"Ultimately, we wanted to bring hard and soft elements together to demonstrate what can be achieved – a place that's peaceful, relaxing and enjoyable." Like those who helped build this visual showpiece, many St. Mary's visitors will also be inspired to achieve the garden of their dreams.

