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Two Gentlemen AND a Farm

EXPERTISE AND INGENUITY
TRANSFORM A NEGLECTED
FARMSTEAD INTO A
FRUITFUL GARDEN AND
INVITING HOME.



THIS PHOTO Chris Houghtaling, left, and James Douthit, right, reimagined an old farm property to give a fresh and functional appeal.



Rosa 'Magic Carpet'

ABOVE LEFT A welcoming pea gravel driveway opens amid a break in the tree border that runs along the street. Planted with *Thuja occidentalis* 'Elegantissima' and *T. plicata* 'Green Giant' and layered with other evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs, the border gives the property a more private and restful feel. **BELOW** Perennial plantings near the entrance to the house are repeated in other areas, connecting every view.





Kousa dogwood
(*Cornus kousa*)

ABOVE LEFT Twenty fancy chickens enjoy a custom chicken shed, earning their keep by providing fresh, multicolor eggs every day. The placement of the chickens, a dog run, and beehives took into account the animals' safety and care, as well as design aesthetics. **BELOW RIGHT** Perennial plantings are based on reliable bloomers and good-looking foliage. Under the Kousa dogwood grow lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) and cranesbill (*Geranium 'Rozanne'*) along with purple May Night salvia and soft red 'Magic Carpet' roses.

The circa-1810 farmhouse, surrounded by a forlorn 1-acre plot, had seen much better days.

But James Douthit, a garden designer, and his partner, Chris Houghtaling, a medical executive, had the skills and imagination to see that the house had potential. They purchased the farmstead abutting about a thousand acres of picturesque conservation land west of Boston and set to work.

James, who founded and runs an award-winning landscape design firm in Wayland, Massachusetts, approached the project as if he were a client. First, the home's interiors were updated. "The goal was to bring the inside out and the outside in to create a visual and functional connection. It makes everything feel larger," James says. A glass wall overlooking a covered porch facing the backyard and wetlands was added to bring the rural view indoors.

Next, the homeowners turned their attention to their favorite part of the makeover—the outdoors. The transformation began with the construction of a patio with separate dining and entertaining areas. The pair hang out here from early spring to late fall with their dogs and an endless stream of guests. "It's all very casual," says Chris, the chef in the family. Everyone leaves with a much-appreciated gift bag featuring goodies such as Chris' grandmother's pickles and all manner of tarts, preserves, grilled vegetables, herb-laced breads, and nutrient-dense main course salads—all prepared with homegrown ingredients.

After the patio, more hardscaping followed, including a series of antique granite pillars and steps, fieldstone walks, picket fencing, and a pea-stone driveway. These elements complement the site while paying homage to the land's New England roots. To round out the aesthetic, flower boxes were attached



May Night salvia
(*Salvia x sylvestris 'Mainacht'*)



ABOVE LEFT The first objective for James and Chris was to restore and update their farmhouse, making it a more comfortable home for them and their three dogs, one cat, and 200-gallon tank of saltwater fish. One of the many updates included restoring the house's original windows. **ABOVE RIGHT** Healthy, happy chickens wander the farm during the day.



ABOVE A 23x27-foot bluestone patio is the foundation for frequent entertaining, with room enough to rearrange furniture depending on the size of the crowd. **BELOW** Transitions between varying grades help define outdoor rooms with different functions. Steps lead down from the back porch and wood deck to the stone patio, and more steps lead further down to the fenced dog run. Fencing is similar throughout the property, and hard surface materials are limited to pea gravel, granite, fieldstone, and bluestone so the entire layout remains cohesive.



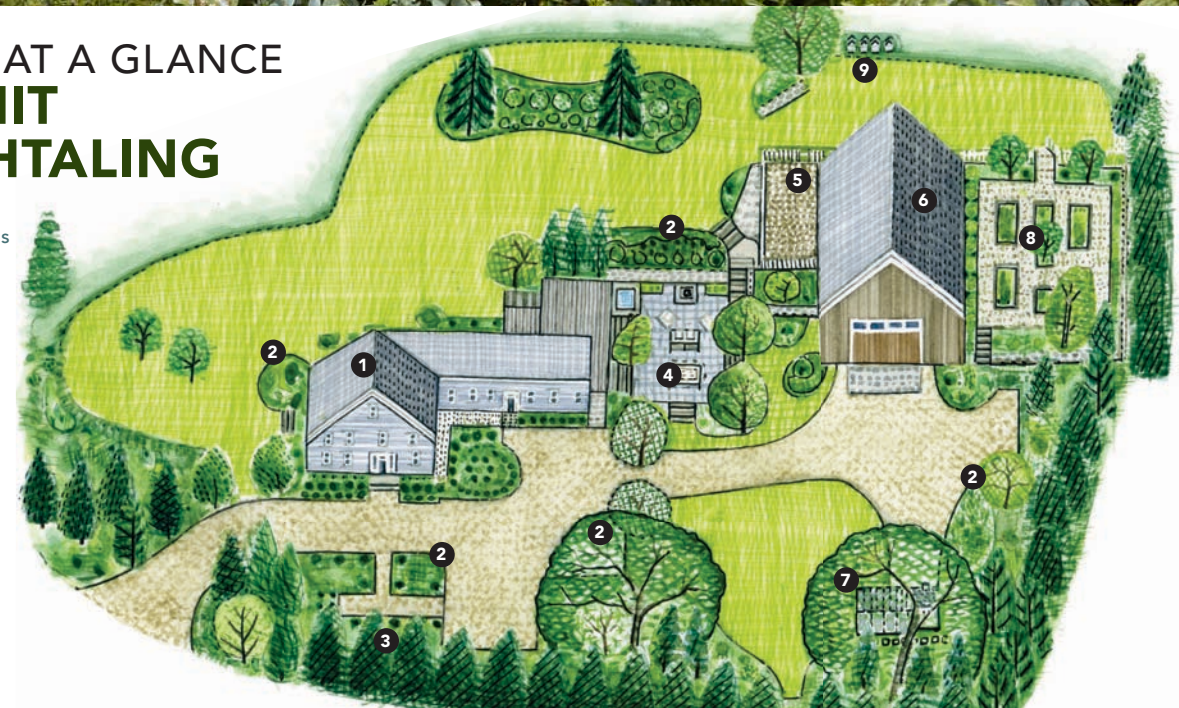
THIS PHOTO Nestling between the house and the barn, the patio has a cozy feel. "The fire pit is lit if the air is nippy. We set up a cocktail and hors d'oeuvre bar and let people help themselves," says Chris.

to the home's main-level windows. Chris takes charge of the seasonal displays. He likes to combine blue pansies, ivy, and *Osteospermum* to herald spring; white geraniums and ivy to celebrate summer; white mums, purple kale, and ivy to welcome fall; and boxwood, pomegranates, and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) to brighten snowy days.

Quickly shielding the house from the road and traffic was one of Chris and James' biggest priorities. Over a three-day period, a dense privacy screen of 72 mature 'Green Giant' arborvitae, Eastern white pines, Canadian hemlocks, and a blend of deciduous birches, maples, and cherry trees was installed to mitigate traffic sounds and enclose the outdoor living areas. The trees blend as they grow, differing heights and textures creating a green tapestry.

GARDEN AT A GLANCE DOUTHIT HOUGHTALING

1. Residence
2. Perennial plantings
3. Evergreen privacy plantings
4. Bluestone patio
5. Dog run
6. Barn
7. Chicken shed
8. Vegetable garden
9. Beehives





Behind the line of layered trees lie vibrant and lush gardens that surround the home. James, who grew up in Hawaii, favors the tropical hues of his childhood for his floral statements. He used a mix of hydrangea cultivars, 'Little Princess' spirea, butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*), rose of Sharon (*Althea syriacus*), magnolia, red roses, and several viburnum species with herbaceous perennials such as *Baptisia australis*, daylilies, and perennial sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*) for blooms that take their turns from spring to fall. 'Green Velvet' boxwood and inkberry (*Ilex glabra*) provide static green foundation textures

to frame the richly varied beds and borders that explode with color and seasonal fragrance.

Both James and Chris try to maintain healthy diets. To stay on track and be sure their produce is pesticide-free, they grow their own. A set of stairs next to the barn leads down to a large but tidy garden of vegetables, berries, herbs, and pest-detering marigolds. The garden showcases heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash, eggplant, Bibb and Boston lettuces, cucumbers, *fraises des bois* (a wild species of strawberry), raspberries, and highbush blueberries. Herbs are a necessity for Chris' recipes,

and there are plenty of them in the garden as well: rosemary, basil, marjoram, chives, sage, English thyme, tarragon, and dill. The couple has a regular supply of fresh eggs from their chickens as well as honey from Chris' bees, which feast on a buffet of pollinating plants in the yard.

The pair completed such a remarkable transformation of the property that James' landscape firm, a Blade of Grass, won a Gold award in 2017 from the Association of Professional Landscape Designers. A neglected fixer-upper is now a peaceful compound for this visionary couple and their friends. **CG**



TOP Chris keeps approximately 40,000 bees at the farm. Much of their annual 90-pound honey crop makes its way into holiday gift baskets. **ABOVE** James planted French marigolds (*Tagetes patula*) along edges of the raised beds to deter whiteflies and some nematodes. **RIGHT** The fenced 35x30-foot vegetable garden holds six raised beds. A young apple tree anchors the center of the garden.

For more information, see Resources on page 110.