

HCG & G

Hamptons Cottages and Gardens

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CASUAL SUMMER STYLE



GARDENING

Natural Touch

GEOFFREY NIMMER OF EAST END GARDENS CLEARS THE PATH TO CALMING LANDSCAPES



HC&G: You started out as a modern dancer. How did you end up in horticulture?

Geoffrey Nimmer: Gardening was a childhood passion while I was growing up in Wayzata, Minnesota. My grandmother was a gardener, and I would dig things up in her garden and then plant them at home. I loved having a vegetable garden, but my grandma also had these great bleeding hearts and ferns and things like that. And I loved going to nurseries to shop for plants, too. I quit dancing when I realized I wanted to garden. I was going to horticultural school at the time, and one day I just didn't want to go to a dance rehearsal—I wanted to study instead.

How has your dance history affected your career as a garden designer?

GN: When I first started gardening, I was living in the city, and I had a lot of dancer friends who didn't understand my change of heart. But dancing and gardening are more alike than different. They are physical and creative, and concern time and space. Being aware of the spatial environment is integral to what dancers and gardeners do.

You've been both for Robert Wilson.

GN: Yes! I first met him when I was performing in *Einstein on the Beach*. Years later, I reconnected with him at a party and told him I was gardening. He invited me to come to the Watermill Center as an intern. I was mostly gardening, but occasionally I found myself performing again. After two summers as an intern, I told Bob he needed an estate gardener and that I wanted the job, and for the next three years I was the estate gardener at the Watermill Center.

Layer Upon Layer *Rosa rugosa* and other dune-like plantings frame a vista of both man-made and natural water features. See *Resources*.



Nature To Nurture
(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) Left to grow wild, native *Azalea viscosum* brightens a Bridgehampton woodland. *Ilex glabra* softens the coping around a pool. A vista of grasses and Russian sage punctuates the view from a property in Water Mill. See Resources.

The other big influence in your life is yoga, which you teach. How does that affect your work?

GN: Yoga is about learning to go with the flow and practicing being in the moment—it helps a lot with client relationships.

What are your goals in a garden?

GN: More and more, I'm finding that I'm interested in native plants and being as organic as possible. I don't like to work with plants that need lots of spraying and pesticides, which ultimately helps me to decide what plants to use. I like bayberry, *Viburnum dentatum*, *Carex pensylvanica*, and cinnamon ferns, and trees and shrubs that create lots of texture and year-round interest. I also like fragrant plants such as osmanthus—it's the best plant because it's evergreen, the deer don't eat it, and it blooms in November with a wonderful scent.

What type of client seeks you out?

GN: Many have come to me through yoga—I think they trust me as a yoga teacher. They feel some sort of personal bond and believe that I will do a good job on their gardens.



How do you maintain your gardens?

GN: As organically as possible. We inherited a rose garden at one project that I'm hoping to change out for something less difficult. Most of my gardens have compost piles, and I use Holly-tone and Plant-tone and such. I haven't gotten into beneficial insects, but in a way when you're not spraying the bad bugs, then you're not killing the good ones. It's important, because all that stuff goes into the water and into the ocean where I love to swim every day. —Alejandro Saralegui

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