

# THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

## It's late February and it's time to think gardens

By [Kathy Renwald](#) Contributing Columnist

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The timing is perfect. Nearing the cusp of spring, Dundas garden writer Tara Nolan's new book is here to share inspiration and practical advice with gardeners.

And the book, "Gardening Your Front Yard: Projects and Ideas for Big and Small Spaces" puts focus on that vital bit of real estate we share with the public — the front yard. Nolan, a writer, speaker and co-founder of the website, [Savvy Gardening](#), is well versed in all aspects of gardening.



Tara Nolan's new book celebrates the social aspect of front yards with inspiration and practical advice. | Kathy Renwald

Right now, she's following how people are using the front yard as social space.

"The social aspect is growing, people are putting small patios in the front yard and places to sit, porches are being used more," Nolan says. "And that's a departure from the trend to take refuge in the backyard."

Nolan, like many other keen gardeners, appreciates the growth of interesting front yard gardens in the Hamilton area. There's acceptance of raised beds in the front, vegetable gardens, swaths of perennials and rain gardens. "We just seem to have more creative license here," she says.

The book is packed with photos, and anyone who has been on a garden tour here will see gardens they are familiar with, from Dundas to the Durand neighbourhood to the North End. So, the information is tied to our climate and not reliant on pretty, but pretty useless, ideas from much warmer locations.

Nolan looks at the book as a jumping off point for people who are making the move from less grass and paving to a front yard filled with plants. The chapters cover a wide range of topics including switching to permeable pavers, building a garden path, capturing rain water, potscaping and planting to attract pollinators. There are even step-by-step building projects including making an obelisk, and a storage hideaway for recycling and trash bins finished with a rooftop garden.



**A ground cover quilt makes a beautiful textured garden. | Donna Griffith**

Though there are photos from across North America, they are carefully chosen to offer us ideas to use here, like building a drought-tolerant garden.

"One of my favourite gardens was in Oakville. The front yard was a ground cover quilt, with a good mixture of plants. So many people plant just one type, but if a pest comes in or it fails, then everything is lost."

The quilt was the idea of landscape designer, Sean James. He used ornamental grasses, veronica, thrift and dwarf junipers in drifts so the garden was interesting to look at but not just a jumble of plants. Massing five or six of the same plants together helps to establish a pattern pleasing to the eye.



Curran Lavender and thyme form a fragrant front yard garden in the garden of Bill Curran and Maryanne Scime. | Donna Griffith

That same garden featured a dry bed of stone designed to divert rain water from a downspout and toward plants, helping to avoid washouts. Plants were also carefully chosen to add interest and texture in the winter.

The idea of connecting with neighbours and community weaves through much of the content. Nolan enjoyed the story of a North End front yard, planted with lavender, thyme and alyssum, it included a Little Free Library and a bench for folks to sit and chat.

This isn't the golden age of gardening books, with so much gardening content moving to online, so it's wonderful to see a real book that can be held in the hand, maybe even while sitting in your front yard patio.

"I've been thinking about this topic for a few years," Nolan says. "I really saw the power of front yard gardens at Garden Walk Buffalo, where the social aspect is so important, and the gardens have improved neighbourhoods."

The garden walk concept would really work here. We already have many fine front yard gardens, assorted tours and Open Garden Week, organized by Spectator columnist Rob Howard.

Now with more encouragement from "Gardening Your Front Yard" due out March 10, the social scene in Hamilton should go into full bloom.

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