

# Italian Dreams

Bloomfield Hills garden pays tribute to a favorite travel destination // Photography by Sally Matak  
By [Jeanine Matlow](#)



**I**nspiration can come from near and far, like this expansive Bloomfield Hills property that emulates Italy, a favorite destination for homeowners Annamarie Acierno-Young and Bill Young. For the project, Amy Schimmel Bessolo, a registered landscape architect with Goldner Walsh Garden and Home in Pontiac, conducted extensive research on Italianate gardens — and she also had to get creative.

“Italian cypress are really scarce and they don’t grow in Michigan,” she says, explaining that her substitutions for the tall and narrow plants came from vertical elements, like Trautman juniper.

Deer posed a challenge, too. “They eat everything,” Bessolo says, “so the plants we chose, such as Russian sage and boxwood, keep in line with the concept and can survive the wildlife.”

To add layers, sweetgum slender silhouette joins scented geranium topiaries and containers of lantana. "There are layers of simple color, but (there's not) a lot of color," Bessolo says. "The garden is really green, framed with simple layers like the climbing hydrangea by the pergola. You also have color with the wisteria on the trellis that's almost like a wall."

Autumnal decorative elements like pumpkins, gourds, and mums suit the scenic setting. "The garden is beautiful in the fall, with evergreens that hold the strength during the season, as well as boxwood and upright juniper," Bessolo says.





*This home features Italian flair, thanks to landscape designs by Amy Schimmel Bessolo.*

In addition to the Italian feel, the homeowners wanted plenty of outdoor seating for entertaining. A pergola-covered dining area and a curved sofa by the stone fireplace create authentic Italian-style gathering areas.

A fountain chosen by the homeowners — “They really wanted that water element,” Bessolo says — became a focal point for the formal garden. Gravel walks, patios lined with granite block, and stacked limestone walls contribute to the Old-World feel.

Derek Spurlock, of Spurlock’s Natural Stone and Brick Paving (based at Goldner Walsh), did the hardscape, while skilled carpenter Jason Cornish, from a subsidiary company, Crooked Tree, constructed the pergola trellis, which features 200-year-old barn wood.

“It’s a very comfortable space,” Bessolo says. “Once you go there, you don’t want to leave.”

Working with Bessolo was a dream for Acierno-Young, who has family in Italy. “We love Italy and we travel there often,” she says. “You can never bring Italy here because they have different growing conditions, but Amy (did a lot of) research and really made it a point to listen.”

The couple’s outdoor oasis even has a pizza oven. “I love to cook and it’s a fun way to entertain,” Acierno-Young says about the al fresco space that’s cozy enough for her and her husband, and can easily accommodate 50 guests. “We can have coffee in the morning and a glass of wine out there on the weekend. It’s peaceful, and it’s designed well.”

“We’re really happy with it,” Young adds. “We would see so much in Italy that wasn’t fussy. It was pretty without being showy.” Adds his wife: “We can’t be in Italy every day, but we can be reminded of it.”

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