

# Butterfly canyon

Create a sheltered front entrance to please winged visitors too

BY SHARON COHOON PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY

**BASKING IN THE SUN** out of the wind is a pleasure for many living creatures. The below-grade entrance to this Santa Fe home is an ideal spot for butterflies, says landscape designer Nate Downey, who helped create it.

Multitiered raised beds and house walls protect the courtyard from breezes. The fountain in the center provides the butterflies with a necessary supply of water. (After spilling down the column, it moistens the rocks below before disappearing underground; siphoning water from a puddle beneath wet rocks is a butterfly's preferred way to drink.) Then Downey packed the area with nectar-rich plants such as lavender and buddleja, which supply the butterflies with a ready food source.

When Downey was brought into the project, the basic design of the entrance was already in place, but most of the plants had died. So he added a few more feet to the tiered wall and filled the planting area behind it with good-quality topsoil; improved the irrigation system so the plants would survive; and then brought in plants more suited to the site that would also attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

The warmth, shelter, and intimacy of the spot are as attractive to humans as they are to wildlife. As the home's owner says: "I love sitting here in the sun and seeing nothing but plants and sky."

**DESIGN** Nate Downey, Santa Fe Permaculture, Santa Fe ([www.sfpermaculture.com](http://www.sfpermaculture.com) or 505/424-4444)

## Three great ideas from this garden

1. Use geology to your advantage. Instead of flattening the property and hauling away tons of bedrock, the designers worked with the natural terrain to develop a valuable microclimate. The reflected warmth from the house and walls also spurs plants to flower earlier and hang on longer than usual—a real bonus in an area with a short growing season.
2. Take advantage of low-tech water-saving techniques. The garden was planted during a Stage 3 Drought Emergency in Santa Fe, when irrigation was allowed only once a week, says Downey. Deep pipe irrigation—which uses perforated PVC pipes filled with gravel to direct water to the plants' root zone—made it possible. (For more information on the subject, visit Santa Fe Permaculture's website, above.)
3. Place nectar-rich plants close to the house. Downey put butterfly and hummingbird pleasers near windows and entrances whenever possible. "Our goal here was for the homeowners to open their front door and discover butterflies," he says. ■



**ABOVE** Flagstone skirting a simple columnar fountain gives the impression of a path winding through a canyon. Yellow- and blue-flowering plants, such as agastache, butterfly bush, and Spanish broom, provide plenty of color near the entry and along the driveway. **RIGHT** Mexican feather grass creates a backdrop for *Coreopsis grandiflora* and *Salvia nemorosa* blooms. **BELOW** Lavender, Russian sage, and santolina add soft color to a sloping bed along the driveway.

