



Purple flower spikes of *Salvia* 'Mainacht' stand 2 to 2½ feet tall in rear and front gardens (below).

## High impact

Colorful low-water plants thrive in these rock gardens

By Marcia Tatroe • Photographs by Paul Bousquet

From the Cascades and the Sierra to the Rockies, the West is richly supplied with mountains. It's only natural, then, that rock gardens should fit so well into our landscapes. Designer Alison Peck takes rock-gardening style to new heights at this home on a mesa overlooking Boulder, Colorado. But Peck's design isn't merely stylish, it's sensible, making use of low-water plants.

Peck replaced a thirsty bluegrass lawn with a water-wise landscape that complements views across the Continental Divide.

At the front of the house, a sculptural rock garden evokes the craggy mountain peaks of the Divide. Peck used locally quarried andesite, a brittle stone that fractures into sharp, angular shapes and has a sparkly surface. Colorful plants are nestled in pockets among the stones. In early summer, the flower spikes of blue *Salvia* x *sylvestris* 'Mainacht' and rosy *Veronica spicata* 'Red Fox'

stand tall against the rocks, while the soft pink blossoms of *Dianthus nardiformis* and hot pink daisies of ice plant hunker down against the stone.

In the rear, another rock garden frames a red sandstone patio. Since plants here are exposed to the full force of sun and wind, Peck used perennials she calls the "toughest of the tough"—magenta wine cups, *S.* 'Mainacht', and white evening primrose.

The new plantings require very little maintenance and are watered by drip irrigation. The rest of the property is planted with native grasses, including blue grama and buffalo grass. For her water-conscious design, Peck received a Xeriscape merit award from the Excellence in Landscape competition sponsored by the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado. ♦



### Peck's plant palette

***Dianthus nardiformis*.** From the *Sunset Western Garden Book*, climate zones A2, A3, 1–24.

**Ice plant** (*Delosperma cooperi*). Zones 2–24.

***Salvia* x *sylvestris* 'Mainacht'**. Zones 2–10, 14–24.

***Veronica spicata* 'Red Fox'**. Zones A2, A3, 1–9, 14–21.

**White evening primrose** (*Oenothera caespitosa*). Zones 1–3, 7–14, 18–21.

**Wine cups** (*Callirhoe involucrata*). Zones 1–3, 7–14, 18–24.