

FALLING WALLS, ADDING PLANTS

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WHAT DO FALLING WALLS have to do with adding plants? I was at a Hardy Fern Foundation (HFF) luncheon sitting at a table with fellow members of NHS and HFF, John and Jane Whiteley. The conversation was, of course, about plants and soon shifted to a situation they had in their garden. They had two dry stack stone walls that were failing. When I visited their site I saw two dry stack walls sinking and leaning back into the hillside. The walls are the focal points looking to the west from the lower patio area, centrally located in the middle of the back garden. The lower wall at 27 ft. long and the upper wall at 22 ft. long had a very narrow planting space due to the settling. I recommended that both walls be removed and rebuilt correctly.

Rebuilding the walls

These are the steps we took to rebuild the walls:

1. Removed and stacked all the rocks.
2. Removed and hauled away the saturated clay dirt and inferior base material.
3. Put down a 4 to 6 inch base of 5/8 minus rock and started rebuilding the wall.
4. Installed 2x4 and 4x4 pieces of wood blocks about 1 ft. long at several random levels.
5. Backfilled the area behind the wall with a combination of gravel and three-way soil.
6. Removed the blocks after two levels above these areas have been completed and filled with three way soil.
7. Removed the soil and used an amended soil mix with selected plants.

Adding the plants

The finished walls have three planting areas. First, the planting in the pockets and crevices that was created in both the upper and lower walls includes *Ophiopogon planiscapes* 'Nigrescens', black evergreen foliage with pink-tinged, white flowers followed by black berries; *Lewisia cotyledon*, rosettes of narrow, fleshy, evergreen leaves and showy clusters of white flowers on long stems; and *Lewisia* 'Norma Jean' with its pink flowers. In addition, we planted a collection of ferns in this area.

Second, the two landings with a southeastern exposure providing sun until noon are planted with two *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Wissel's Saguaro' of different heights and two dwarf rhododendrons. The groundcover layer of this planting includes *Epimedium* 'Spine Tingler', *Trillium rivale*, the limey-green *Sedum rupestre* 'Angelina', and the quite striking *Oxalis griffithii*,

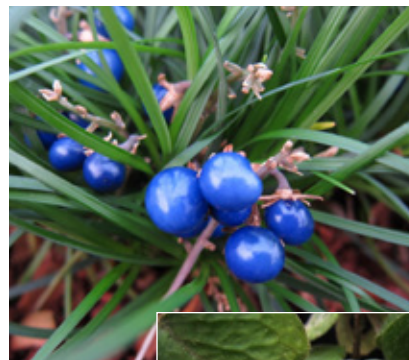
a double-flowered Japanese selection with white flowers.

Third, the north plant-ing area provides for an interesting combination of shade-loving plants. *Dryopteris dilatata* 'Jimmy Dyce', a fern with a stiff, upright growth habit provides space for an underplant-ing of *Adiantum aleuticum* 'Subpumilum', *Polypodium x mantoniae* 'Cornubiense', and two dwarf mondo grasses: *Ophiopogon chingii* 'Sparkler', a very slow clumper with blue shiny fruit, and *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Nana'.

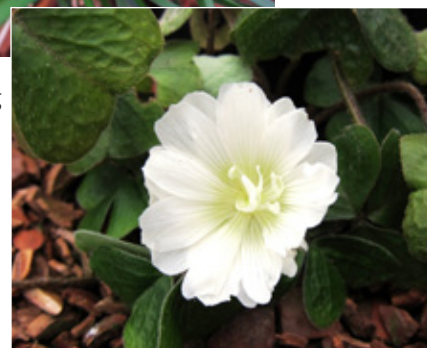
The Whiteleys were happy with their revitalized dry stacked stone walls with their new plantings, and will be able to enjoy them for many years.

Special thanks to Far Reaches Farm for their unique plants, information, and photos and to Sue Olsen and Judith Jones for their expert knowledge of ferns. 🌿

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LEFT:
Ophiopogon chingii
'Sparkler'
BELOW: *Oxalis griffithii*
(Far Reaches Farm)



LEFT: The finished dry stacked stone wall and plantings (Forrest Campbell)