

Roger Auman has been gardening with tropical plants for over ten years. It's his passion, his hobby, he may even refer to it as his obsession just before he laughs. Thirty-five palm trees that found their way into an Olympian garden have been intriguing neighbors and passers-by for years! It's a surprise to see plants that are normally associated with warmer climates such as China, India, South America, New Zealand and the Mediterranean in the backyard of an historic Olympia home. Choosing plants that are from similar climate zones helps these tropical beauties thrive in the Pacific Northwest. Roger Auman and Bill Long's garden reflects the appreciation of the unusual in terms of foliage, plant texture, color, and fragrance. Plants that attract birds are sought out and planted in this eclectic garden. Plants are selected based on their hardiness and if a plant doesn't thrive, it's replaced by one that will.

Some of these plants have specific needs that our native plants do not, the banana tree for example, needs to be protected with an insulated blanket in the winter months. Most of the plants in this tropical collector's paradise are broad leaved evergreens that survive in our mild rainy winters and thrive in the dry summer months. This garden is an artistic outlet as well as a source of relaxation for Roger and Bill.

How many hours a week do you spend working in the garden? Roger estimates about eight hours per week in the spring are spent in the garden and less at other times of the year.

How do you control pests in the garden? "Worry-Free," least-toxic slug control deals with the slugs and snails that are the only real garden pests in this garden. Weeds are minimized with close plant spacing and mulch. Hand weeding is considered an opportunity to 'get close' to the plants, creating opportunities for ongoing observation that helps eliminate any problems before they take hold. Raccoons and possums regularly forage through the garden eating slugs and snails. Wild birds are fed in the garden. When the chicks hatch, their parents gather aphids for a rich protein source.

What is the watering strategy for such a diverse garden? The garden is divided into watering zones. Many areas of the garden don't receive any water at all, since many of the plants are selected for their drought-tolerance and don't need it. During the hottest months, the garden areas that do require water receive about 5 minutes each a few times a week. Either plants are hand watered or a direct sprinkler is connected. Soil observation and plants that show signs of stress such as drooping leaves determine water needs.

Do you use compost in the garden? Compost is used as a soil amendment for new plantings and as mulch. We really like the look of rich, dark compost mulch as a top dressing in the garden. Leaves are shredded and added to the worm bin to create our own compost and we buy what we need to supplement. Shredded leaves are also used as mulch in areas of the garden, especially those from the Eucalyptus tree that help keep insects away.

What about fertilizing? Organic, slow-release fertilizers, worm tea, worm castings and fish fertilizer are rotated throughout the garden to meet fertilizing needs. I fertilize some place in the garden every few weeks, rotating so that the entire garden is fertilized a couple of times a year.

Do you attract wildlife to your garden? Birds love the substantial canopy. We seem to get a lot of small birds such as finches, hummingbirds, and sparrows. We also have raccoon, possum, fox, and porcupine that come through.

What gardening challenges do you deal with? Finding enough time to spend in the garden. It seems as though there is never enough time! I am always moving plants around trying to find the place where they are happiest.

What about gardening is fun or satisfying to you? This is where Roger shares that gardening is his hobby as well as his obsession. The relaxation found through gardening cannot be found any place else, all obsessions aside.