

**The Huntsman** garden is a mix of cultivation and wildness. Twelve years ago, Pat and Henry Huntsman began the transformation of a once-lackluster small city lot into an exuberantly full garden filled with color and texture. The Huntsmans have lived in their home since 1979, when the garden consisted of a small lawn, overgrown shrubs close to the house, and a huge fir tree in the middle of the 50-foot wide front yard. The tree was removed after a few years due to concerns that it might fall onto the house during a windstorm. Major renovation came in 1993. It was during that year that the grass and overgrown shrubs were removed. Yards of soil and compost were brought in to create healthy planting beds. Henry spent the next several months building a round brick patio and paths, as well as a lattice fence for some privacy from the street. A friend built an attractive arch to mark the entry to the garden.

Pat at the time was enamored with the “English garden” look, and planted the front beds with billowing perennials. The effect was stunning in the summer, but what a shock in the winter—the garden looked brown and dead. It was at this point that they realized they needed to re-think their original idea. Over a period of years the front area has evolved to be a four-season garden. Most of the flowering perennials have been replaced with plants that provide year-round interest and structure. Many of the plants are evergreen. There are also about a dozen dwarf conifers, which add a lot of “presence” in the winter. Near the front entry there are a number of large containers that are also planted for year-round interest.

Rather than relying only on flowers, Pat has re-designed the garden to emphasize foliage. She has searched out plants that have interesting foliage, and has carefully located the plants to play off each other in terms of contrasting size and shape, as well as color and texture. When most people think of foliage, they think “green,” but Pat has branched out looking for shades of chartreuse, ebony, silver, gold, plum, and burgundy. She has also included some variegated shrubs and plants in the garden for extra punch, such as a newer comfrey (*Symphytum uplandicum* ‘Axminster Gold’).

On the south side of the house, a narrow brick path with a spectacular view of the Capitol Dome leads to the back garden. This south-facing garden bed was once a hot and sunny space used by Pat for growing tomatoes and herbs, but over the years a neighbor’s vine maple has grown tall, creating shade and an opportunity to experiment with new plants that thrive under these conditions. The repetition along the path of Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa*) in shades of gold-to-chartreuse unifies the look of the narrow planting bed.

The back garden looks out through carefully limbed-up fir trees to a beautiful view of Capitol Lake and Mount Rainier. This is a partially shaded area, and several birdbaths as well as feeders attract a number of different birds to this part of the garden. Native plants mix in with rhododendrons, hardy fuschias, ferns, hostas, hellebores, and hydrangeas.

A raised bed near the driveway once held roses (at one time Pat had 40 roses in the garden), but the upkeep became too difficult, so she removed the roses, and the area

recently became a “meadow” of ornamental grasses of contrasting shapes, sizes, and colors.

The parking strip was re-vamped last November and features interesting large rocks, stepping stones, drought-tolerant kinnikinnick, and coppery ornamental grasses. Two young paperbark maples will add interest as they mature, with brilliant fall foliage and intriguing reddish peeling bark in the winter. Todd Harris of The Stone People did the stone work, and collaborated with Karen McCarthy and the Huntsmans on the design.

**How many hours a week do you spend in the garden?** Usually 7-8 hours a week are spent in the garden. Occasionally garden help is hired to do specific jobs or a spring clean up.

**How do you deal with pests?** No chemicals are used in the garden. The slug bait that is used is safe for birds and animals. Pat also often goes on “slug patrol” in the early mornings armed with a spray bottle filled with 1/3 ammonia and 2/3 water. This is not harmful to plants, but is fatal to slugs.

Weeds are usually pulled by hand, and a propane weed-burning torch is used to remove weeds in gravel areas. Mulches of various types are used to hold down weeds and preserve moisture in the soil.

**How do you water your garden?** “I even enjoy hand-watering, most of the time, as it can become a contemplative activity allowing me to enjoy the garden and keep a close watch on things.” There are two rain barrels to help conserve water. Soaker hoses take care of four separate areas of the garden and drought-tolerant plants learn to tolerate drought in this garden!

**Do you use compost in the garden?** A compost bin makes good use of prunings, coffee grounds, and selected food scraps. Worm compost is purchased for its rich nutrients and used as a soil amendment and mulch. All of the fertilizers—used occasionally for plants that look as though they need something extra—are organic.

**Do you attract wildlife to your garden?** Bird feeders and bird baths attract many different birds to the garden. Hummingbirds come for the hardy fuschias and the many layers of this garden provide plenty of shade and cover for any animals that wander in.

**What is one of your biggest gardening challenges?** Gardening is a process where you never quite know how it’s going to work out. The on-going challenge of keeping up with the maintenance is one of the greatest joys too—it’s never done!

**What makes gardening satisfying for you?** “Gardening is my therapy,” says Pat. She is passionate about the creative aspects of garden design and plant selection. She anticipates that gardening will continue to provide her opportunities for stimulation and learning for years to come.