

Ron Locke's corner lot sits several feet above street level and is packed with drama, boldness and a profusion of life that belies its limited space. Aided by a landscape plan designed by Karen McCarthy, Ron put the "good bones" of the garden to connect the existing hardscapes with new ones. Large boulders were set into the hillside to create strong and interesting structure as well as nooks and crannies for countless plantings.

A visit to Ron's garden provides opportunity to view a great variety of plant materials of various sizes, shapes, textures and hues, blending together to create a tapestry that delights the eye at every turn.

A passionate gardener, Ron selects plants that are far from typical. Although he has some standards, his tastes lean toward "specimen" varieties and occasionally the exotic. Ron has collected countless grasses, sedums, a large variety of groundcovers, deciduous and evergreen shrubs and trees, including an extraordinary assortment of conifers. Although flowers are present, foliage is "king" in this garden, providing interest in all seasons.

How much time do you spend in the garden on average? Ron spends about 8 to 10 hours per week in his garden weeding, planting, maintaining and working on special projects.

How do you deal with pests in the garden? Ron co-exists with pests. He has moles, squirrels, slugs, aphids, voles, and deer that frequent his garden area. The deer are particularly fond of his dogwood. The neighborhood cats help with the vole control. The aphids are easily handled with a squirt of the garden hose.

For weed control, Ron uses close plantings to reduce the amount of bare soil showing. Most of the active weed control happens in the pathways, where they are easily pulled and mulched over.

What do you use for fertilizer in the garden?

Ron does not fertilize except in potted plants. Instead, he relies on compost for his planting beds.

How do you keep up with the watering needs of such an abundant garden? Water use early on was common for a new garden getting established, but now that the garden is maturing, the need for water has decreased substantially. Eventually, Ron would like to have his drip irrigation system set up so that watering happened on its own. For now he relies on hand watering, sprinklers and the occasional drip line that has managed to find its way into the garden.

Do you have disease issues in this garden?

It is important to Ron to have a low-maintenance landscape, so he avoids plants that are disease prone or have soil or climate difficulties. If a plant has a problem in his garden, he prefers to replace it rather than allow it to limp along. His philosophy is that there are so many beautiful varieties that will make it, why bother wasting time over those that won't.

What are your biggest gardening challenges? Ron hopes that his biggest gardening challenge is behind him—working out the drainage for the garden. The north side of the garden in particular had drainage issues that he has worked through, creating the stream bed and dry falls to the parking strip. Watering is getting easier as the garden has matured and the plants have become established. Weeding the pathways is an ongoing challenge that he manages with layers of mulch.

What about gardening is most satisfying for you? Ron finds his natural ability to care for things is honed in his garden. He appreciates the creative outlet, the reason to be outside, and the companionship of the plants.