

Linda Murphy and David Cheal wanted to design a garden that they could spend time enjoying, rather than spend all of their time working in. They worked with a designer to create a low maintenance, drought-tolerant landscape and did the heavy work up front, adding 36 cubic yards of compost and roto-tilling it into the existing top soil. This approach has definitely paid off as the garden matures beautifully thanks to all of the organic matter and mulch it needs to thrive and keep its carefree style. The drip-irrigation system helps keep the maintenance down. This garden has “curb appeal,” with plantings all the way down to the sidewalk. Colorful flowers add summer color to a garden full of native plants and a small, naturally-maintained lawn, just big enough for the grandkids to play on. Since these gardeners “don’t like to use poisons,” the grandkids can roll and jump and play barefoot all day long.

**How many hours a week do you spend gardening?** On average, four hours a week are spent in the garden.

**How do you control pests?** Keeping things as healthy as possible is the best defense against pests. Aphids get a soapy spray and slug bait is used occasionally although these gardeners are transitioning to a least-toxic brand of slug control. With more choices for alternatives on the market, it’s easier than ever to avoid toxic products.

**How do you fertilize?** Fertilizing happens about twice a year, although, last year they didn’t even need it. Slow-release, organic fertilizers have proven effective and if they miss an application, they don’t worry about it. Not when the garden looks this good!

**Tell us about your watering strategies.** Establishing the garden used enough water to attract the attention of City of Olympia’s Water Resources staff. A water audit is offered to the City’s biggest consumers of water. In response to the suggestions made in the audit, Linda and David were able to cut down on their water use by 33%. There is an extensive drip system for bigger shrubs and trees. The lawn is on a sprinkler system although, to decrease water use, the lawn goes dormant in the summer.

**What approach do you use for controlling diseases?** The only plants tolerated with potential for disease in this garden are roses. In the past, they were sprayed 2-3 times a year with fungicide. To keep disease from spreading, pruners are cleaned after every use with a bleach solution. Currently, they are trying two methods for preventing black spot; moving the roses to a sunnier location and using a non-toxic baking soda recipe. (see *The Common Sense Guide to Roses*, for the recipe)

**How do you handle weeds?** Weeds are dug out by hand or a weed wrench. Mulch and dense plantings prevent weeds from sneaking into beds. As a last resort, weeds get spot sprayed with glyphosate (brand name, “Round Up”) before going to seed.

**What are your biggest gardening challenges?** Keeping plants pruned in this quickly growing landscape has been a challenge to keep up with.

**What makes gardening fun or satisfying for you?** To watch things grow and change is the fun part. The end result and looking at what all of that hard work created is very satisfying. These gardeners are even soothed by the summer-time sound of their mulching lawn mower!