

Deb Ross and Brian Hovis have created an urban retreat in this uniquely located organic garden. Indian Creek bisects the property, offering opportunity for native, stream-side plantings, constructed swales and hardscaping all designed to help the storm water run-off move more slowly on its path to the creek. The garden's design prevents flooding and with its location in the "bowl" of the neighborhood, that helps everyone out. The wild areas that surround the garden create a dramatic back drop for the more maintained, but no less wild, planted garden. The entire family enjoys and benefits from the seasonal vegetable garden.

Native plants create a low-maintenance landscape that encourages wildlife and the dense plantings help to soften the sound from the roar of the freeway. Native plants are those indigenous to our ecosystem. They are generally more disease and pest-resistant than ornamental plants or delicate hybrids since they have evolved along with the disease and pests in our area. Native plants do not need supplemental watering after the first year or two, getting established.

How many hours a week do you spend gardening? About one hour a day, every day from mid-February until August. In August even the weeds are wilting, providing an opportunity to simply relax and literally enjoy the fruits of the labor!

How do you control pests? Slugs are prevented by picking up excess vegetation in slug-prone areas. They still manage to find their way in and the ones found on weekly patrols are "chopped in half." Beer traps are used around vegetable beds and a non-toxic slug control is used for lettuce, basil and peas. Aphids get a hard spray of water on any plant they infest. Deer are repelled with a non-toxic spray used on desirable flowers and berries.

How do you fertilize? The lawn gets fertilized in the spring and fall with a slow-release organic fertilizer. Plants just getting established and non-native plants receive a slow-release fertilizer in April and then liquid organic fertilizer monthly through July. Vegetable and cutting gardens, new planting beds and the native plant area above the property benefit from regular applications of compost.

Tell us about your watering strategies. Watering is determined largely by whether it is a drought year or not. All of the native plants can survive without water. Since this family is on a well, watering is very limited in a drought year. There is a six zone irrigation system for most of the yard and soaker hoses in the vegetable and cutting gardens.

What approach do you use for controlling diseases? The garden hasn't had many disease problems thanks to mostly native plants.

How do you handle weeds? Weeds are minimized by early and regular weeding, mulching and by planting beds tightly to shade out undesired plants. Hand pulling is a regular part of the weekly work load and thyme is planted in gravel paths to help control weeds in the path. A flexible definition of "ground cover" that includes many plants that some might consider weeds creates a lower-maintenance landscape.

What are your biggest gardening challenges? The biggest challenges in this garden are moles and keeping backs strong and able-bodied.

What makes gardening fun or satisfying for you? Providing an opportunity for regular healthy outdoor activity that involves the entire family. Enjoying the beauty of the landscape created.