

Donna and Dick Whitehead's garden is an example of creativity flourishing alongside the plants. The visitor is struck by the bits of art that enliven this meticulously planted garden. Touches of whimsy include a "bowling ball" garden, window-pane framed spaces and creative trellises that convey these gardeners' playful side along with their green thumbs. The foundation of this garden is well established and allows the creativity to flow in an ordered stream of color and fancy. Visitors can admire the lush lawn that highlights colorful planting beds. The small greenhouse is filled to the brim with color while the cozy backyard is alight with birds and butterflies enjoying the blooms and dense plantings just right for habitat. The water features add to the sound and feel of this garden that has been passion and play for this newly retired couple.

How many hours a week do you spend gardening? The work load in this garden, as with many, is seasonal. In the spring - early summer, "high" season Donna spends 2-3 full days in the garden a week. She is recently retired and excited to have so much time to dedicate to the garden, finally!

How do you control pests? As much as possible, the Whiteheads avoid plants that are prone to pest infestation. Sluggo and the "knife" deal with slugs. Ladybugs are purchased and introduced into the garden for aphids and they are able to out-compete many insect pests. Squirrels are one of the biggest pests in the garden, always looking for a free meal, so they try to keep bird feeders out of their busy reach. The dog is encouraged to chase the squirrels and he does a decent job at deterring them.

How do you fertilize? There are different fertilizing strategies for different areas. For example, the roses and lilies are fertilized in the spring with alfalfa pellets. The lawn gets fertilized in the spring and fall after soil is amended with sand and dolomite lime. In the planting beds, composted manure is added in late spring. The pots and annual plants are regularly fertilized throughout the blooming summer months.

Water conservation is important. What is your approach to watering?

Two rain barrels provide water for the greenhouse and the many pots and raised beds. Sprinklers are used on the lawn (**how often? One inch a week?**) All of the beds have soaker hoses that are set on timers. The many hanging baskets are watered on a timer as well, in the early morning.

What approach do you use for controlling diseases? Plant selection plays a large role in disease prevention. Plants that are unable to thrive are removed and replaced by something hardier. A professional service sprays a dormant oil spray a few times year to prevent disease problems.

How do you handle weeds? They find that the easiest way to keep up with weeds is regular hand pulling. Pea gravel mulch in the driveway prevents weeds in a difficult-to-get-to location. In plant beds, thick compost mulching along with close plant spacing keeps weeds under control. Bark chips are used as mulch in areas where compost isn't appropriate and an "L" shaped knife deals with those pesky weeds between pavers and bricks.

What kinds of wildlife visit your garden? Donna keeps her own mason bee colony, and they pollinate the vibrant garden in early spring. Bird feeders filled with black oil sunflower seeds, bird houses scattered throughout the trees, and a lovely bird bath attract a wide variety of birds. Birds also love the running water in the water feature. Luckily, deer aren't a problem and the dog has created his own paths around the garden that Donna agrees not to plant.

What are your biggest gardening challenges? The greenhouse comes with a learning curve. Donna is just discovering its potential as well as its potential for problems. Other than that, the biggest challenge is having enough space for all of the plants begging to be played with.

What makes gardening fun or satisfying for you? The peacefulness of the garden even when “working” in it. Playing with the colors and textures of plants to create an always-evolving “whole picture.” It is a creative outlet that the two can share. There is always more to learn and another unusual plant to try out!