

Linda Andrews and Gene Walker have worked hard to create an organic, drought-tolerant landscape to benefit wildlife and create privacy. These dedicated gardeners have all but completed their mission of replacing tedious lawn with native plants and colorful low-water users. Only one small strip of turf remains. As a landscape designer, Linda had the clear vision of what she wanted to create. The Garden Tour offered her and her family the motivation and opportunity to tackle an entire to-do-list!

Mature beds surrounding the front and side of the house are well-established, in contrast to the back yard, which has just received a total make-over. A dry stream bed that feeds a rain garden and a centerpiece fountain that feeds a small pond are just a few of the new features to discover. The focal point of the yard used to be an old walnut tree; when it was removed this past year, the dynamics of the entire yard shifted. The old concrete patio was replaced with beautiful flagstone (don't ask how much hard work that involves!). All of the plants in this landscape have been selected for their ease of care as well as full-season interest.

Water conservation is important; tell us about your watering strategies. Rain barrels save water from spring's rains to be used when the plants need them most. Soaker hoses work great for newly planted areas and prized blueberry bushes that need water. Hand watering most of the yard lets Linda target only the plants that need it. These are water-stingy gardeners who water mature areas only if they show signs of stress.

How do you control pests? Pests are avoided as much as possible by planting plants that don't attract them. Slugs are trapped with beer and highly susceptible plants are surrounded with diatomaceous earth. This organic garden is teeming with beneficial insects and Linda credits them for keeping pests under control. Deer are the biggest problem and fencing keeps them out of much of the yard. Favored deer plants are planted near the house, off of their usual route. For the plants that do receive "pruning," tolerance is practiced!

How do you fertilize? The soil is regularly improved with compost and mulch rather than a regular fertilizer regimen. Blueberries receive an organic acid fertilizer and container plants occasionally receive fish fertilizer. Organic fertilizers with trace minerals help newly planted trees establish themselves quickly and without stress.

What approach do you use for controlling diseases? When disease-prone plants are found, they are quickly replaced with those that are disease-tolerant. Plants are placed in areas where they can thrive best and pruned to improve air circulation. Watering is done early in the day so that plants don't stay wet. Careful watering avoids wetting the foliage.

How do you handle weeds? Weeds are prevented as much as possible with a thick layer of mulch. Those that find their way into the garden are pulled before they have a chance to go to seed. Nothing replaces the art of hand pulling, and Linda has a great farmer's tool that gets into crevices in paths. A flame weeder is used in the spring and spring and fall clean up goes a long way towards preventing weeds throughout the year.

Do you attract wildlife to your garden? Native plants provide a range of early and late nectar sources to attract birds and pollinators. Plants with berries for food and plants with thorns for protection attract a

diversity of wildlife. Many layers of shelter and water sources also encourage a diversity of wildlife into this protective garden.

What are your biggest gardening challenges? Clay soil makes everything more work but these experienced gardeners accept that. The real challenge involves having enough time to do everything that the vision for this garden holds.

What makes gardening fun or satisfying for you? Gardening is a challenging and deeply satisfying art form. Working in three dimensions within the changing seasons offers opportunities to connect with nature and learn. Watching each season unfold, watching the birds and other critters make use of the garden, and being a part of that unfolding is gratifying work!