

Jann and Bob Bonnett's garden begins like any other well-planned landscape in a manicured neighborhood, but when you turn the corner into the backyard, it becomes a cutting gardener's dream. The garden design has been evolving since 1994. As you walk through the gardens you explore a variety of distinct growing areas on the one-acre site. The back area is an intricate design with annual cutting beds radiating from a hub like spokes on a wheel. Jann and Bob describe their garden as a working flower farm.

Each year the Bonnetts plan their annual garden. A large variety of flowers are seeded directly into the ground, which yield nearly 10,000 plants after thinning. These young seedlings are then nurtured with a layer of the Bonnett's own aged compost. You will see everything from *Salvia*, *Scabiosa*, statice, and *Zinnias* to *Brizia* grass, Bells-of-Ireland, *Amaranthus*, and *Calendula* 'Touch of Red'. Flowering shrubs and perennials in the border gardens give structure and set the stage for row upon row of blooms for cutting in the working garden. They pride themselves in adding unusual highlights to their floral designs: garlic tops, grasses, twigs, huckleberry, *Euphorbia*, and *Rudbeckia* 'Green Wizard'.

How many hours a week do you spend working in your garden? During the planting and growing season, between the two of us, probably 30 hours, or more, per week, depending on the weather and projects. We also maintain the cul-de-sac garden for the neighborhood.

How often do you water and what kind of watering system do you use? Bob designed and installed an elaborate drip and sprinkling system, which he completed this year. It turned out to be a labor-intensive project, trenching for water, power and data lines. The system adjusts for percentage of water used, timing, and also has a rain sensor. It is one system with three programs for grass, perennials, and annuals — each

timed for specific water needs and adjusted based on plant maturity.

How do you use compost or mulch? In the spring, we use a top dressing of our own compost. This year we added mushroom compost. Both were rototilled into the existing soil, which had been covered with straw during the winter months. The pathways are mulched with cedar shavings.

What is your procedure for fertilizing? We use corn gluten exclusively on the lawn twice a year. It not only takes care of virtually all of the weeds, but also gives a lush green and healthy appearance. We don't add any fertilizer to the flowerbeds after the initial compost treatment, except Epsom salts for roses and some shrubs.

What steps do you use for avoiding plant diseases and pests? We use Common Sense Gardening techniques by planting plants in the right place with proper spacing for good air circulation. We also keep the garden free of fallen leaves and other debris that may harbor disease. We try to be proactive and take care of plant needs before problems can occur. We sometimes place slug bait around vulnerable seedlings until they grow big enough to withstand the nibbling.

How do you handle weeds? We use corn gluten for the lawn and hand pull in flowerbeds and pathways. We remove the weeds when small and don't allow them to go to seed (except for the weeds that are hiding!).

What makes gardening satisfying to you? Gardening is a peaceful uninterrupted time for us and we both enjoy experiencing the passing of the seasons. I am a very nurturing person and enjoy planting, mowing, and weeding. Bob is the creative thinker and planner and does the jobs requiring intensive labor. We both do this for the joy that our flowers bring to other people.

Interview by Cindy Fairbrook