

Susan and Jerry Glendenning's

suburban property in northeast Olympia offers a stunning example of the magic that can happen when two people commit to becoming stewards of their land. Married in the front garden arbor in 1998, the couple was eager to continue their design and planting activities for three reasons. They enjoy working together, they like the exercise, and Susan, who is an artist, dreamed of sketching and painting their landscape. Now called "Angels Nest Garden," the oasis around their home is a delightful mix of plantings combined with pleasing surprises. Along the paths an array of statuary peek out from tree trunks: gurgling fountains, massive boulders and original haiku poetry nestle in the shrubs.

Roses on the Glendenning's property include teas, landscapes, floribundas and climbing varieties. Trees include Douglas and alpine firs; and vine, red and Orido Nashiki maples. In addition, visitors walking the bark trails will see more than 50 varieties of perennials, such as sweet William, sweet woodruff, Homestead verbena, monkshood, astilbe, aster, and hellebore as well as many groundcovers and ferns. The garden also hosts more than 30 different vines and shrubs, including Mexican orange, spirea, escalonia, and three kinds of boxwoods. (See the attached plant list.)

How many hours per week do you spend maintaining your gardens during peak growing season? We work in the gardens at least eight to twenty hours a week — obviously more when doing projects or building a new bed.

What fertilizers do you use? We apply organic fertilizers to all gardens four times a year and lime our small lawn twice a year. Once every year we top dress all perennials with composted chicken manure and organic compost. We also apply compost tea to all plants once a year. In the spring, we sprinkle one cup of alfalfa pellets around each rose bush and incorporate a slow-release fertilizer into the soil at planting time.

How do you control pests? Though we ignore slugs most of the year, we watch our new annuals carefully for the first few weeks after planting and use slug bait if needed with the non-toxic iron-phosphate bait. We also try to plant varieties that slugs don't like. Ants used to worry me until I

learned the peonies need them in order to bloom. Now we ignore them.

How do you avoid disease problems? We are dedicated to not using pesticides or herbicides, using safe, natural preparations instead. Our only disease occurs with some varieties of roses and phlox, so we keep the soil clean, watering only the rose roots, avoiding water on the leaves. When needed, we use an organic horticultural oil spray. Generally, we strive for a healthy garden environment and trust it will happen.

What is your approach to weeding? Bark helps control weeds in some of our gardens. Landscape fabric and cedar chips work well in our paths. Spring cleanup helps, too. We also hand pull weeds and use a weed whacker in some areas.

Water conservation is important. What is your approach to watering? Helping plants capture enough water has been a huge challenge for us because our land rests on 900 feet of rock. The water runs off, down and through. So, amending and adding soil to hold water has taken time, muscle and creative thinking. We observe the plants carefully and check the soil to determine their watering needs. Our potted plants are hand watered three times a week during summer; established, more hardy plants get watered less often with soaker hoses and sprinklers.

When asked why she gardens, Susan replies, "My favorite thing about our landscape is its nurturing quality." The gardens are a peaceful retreat where she can meditate or sketch with pastels, illustrating the texture, form and color of the plant groups. For Jerry, gardening with Susan is "the recreational glue that bonds our relationship. We're still learning about gardening and playing as we go." Together, they host a variety of gatherings in their gardens, including outdoor sing-a-longs, elder ceremonies and world peace meditations. Angels Nest Garden is a registered sanctuary with the Cortesia Project, which encourages peace studies and earth stewardship. See www.cortesia.org for more information.

Interview by Sharon Moore