

Colleen Janney's garden offers a striking illustration of the creative potential of a fenced, suburban lot. During the past ten years she has transformed a backyard into ornamental gardens displaying a variety of color and texture variations. Carefully observing the upward slope of her backyard and light levels around her property, Colleen separated the upper and lower levels of the yard with a curving stone wall and wide stairway. She established a shade garden, a grass garden, a fern garden, a wildflower garden, perennial flowering gardens and a modified vegetable garden. Each area adds to the overall esthetics of the total garden. One of her newest projects is a raised bed vegetable garden, one half of which will hold compost. Colleen's personal touch is evident everywhere. Her "River of Thyme," for example, offers a sweeping flow of woolly thyme dotted with four large stones, each representing one of her four children.

Colleen learned to garden from her mother and raised flowers and vegetables in Missouri for thirty-five years before moving to Olympia eleven years ago. Her fascination with unusual plants is evident throughout the property. Colleen enjoys visiting other gardens, reading gardening books and material, and talking with people about plants.

How many hours per week do you spend in the garden during growing season?

Colleen: I easily spend twenty to twenty five hours a week during the early growing season in my garden. As the season progresses, less maintenance is required.

How do you control pests?

Colleen: Fortunately, because I have a fence, deer and rabbits are not a problem. Positioning steak knives every yard along my garden beds allows me to make short work of any slug I find. I don't use pesticides, but I do water spray the few aphids I find. I also see earwigs, spiders and a few other insects that I generally choose to ignore.

How do you fertilize?

Colleen: I maintain a compost area to one side of my formal gardens where I compost both lawn clippings and kitchen waste. Each spring I use this and purchased compost as a top dressing in my plant beds. The lawn is fertilized four times a year. I fertilize my flower beds with 15-15-15 on Valentine's Day, Easter, Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. Transplants get fish fertilizer.

Containers of flowers get a slow-release fertilizer, when planted.

Water conservation is important these days.

How often do you water your gardens?

Colleen: I use soaker hoses and sprinklers. The containers are hand watered. To conserve water, I monitor the soil, and only add water when it gets dry. I use an empty tuna can to carefully measure the watering level so that I don't waste water. One inch is usually enough.

How do you handle plant diseases?

Colleen: If a plant is diseased, I pull it and put it in the yard waste barrel. The only roses I grow at this point are disease resistant shrub or climbing roses. I don't replace plants that seem to be disease prone.

Weeds bother most of us. What is your approach to eradicating them?

Colleen: The back part of the property was entirely covered with ivy, blackberries and bracken fern. I hand dug the blackberries and pulled the others, and found native plants waiting to be discovered. This approach required a program of maintenance every few months to remove the succeeding generations. As a fan of the organic approach, I don't use herbicides. I really don't have a weed problem in my garden beds because I work at not letting them go to seed. If I see a weed, I pull it. The steak knives come in handy for digging weeds, too. Laying down heavy bark mulch keeps weeds out of my garden paths. I've learned to live with moss in my lawn, which allows me to spend more time with the shrubs and flowers.

Do you try to welcome beneficial wildlife to your garden?

Colleen: Yes. I provide bird feeders, a birdbath and a bat house, although I haven't seen bats using it yet."

Asked what she likes about growing things, Colleen replies, "In my garden, I particularly enjoy the quiet and peacefulness, with the sounds of birds and water flowing. I love to try new ideas. I have greatly enjoyed the Master Gardener program, and the opportunity to learn new things in their demonstration gardens. The friendly, knowledgeable people I've met in that group are the frosting on the cake!"