

**Dan Kelly** has been gardening at his site for about 14 years. “I brought in the rocks probably nine or ten years ago, and that’s when I really got going on the landscape,” he explains. Dan’s passion for rocks and his skill at working with them are evident in his garden. “Part of why I garden is to honor that connection with nature, with the soil. Rocks are even more basic than soil.” Dan goes on with enthusiastic awe, “I love to see lichens growing on rock. They take the air, a bit of water and actually create soil right from the rock!”

Dan has incorporated the elements of fire, water, air, and earth into his garden. As you approach his home, a dramatic waterfall empties into a pond. Tucked away behind a few boulders is a fire ring. And, as he says, the lichens continue to create earth from air.

**How many hours a week do you spend in your garden during the growing season?**

Dan: Being a business owner, I’m working most of the time. I’d say I spend between six to eight hours a week on the garden, plus an hour a week on the pool.

**How do you water?** Dan: I have a timer clock that I use when it gets dry. I’m careful not to over-water — I prefer to check the soil and provide what the plants need. I use drip irrigation through the vegetables, overhead sprinklers and micro-jet sprays (a mini-sprinkler) in the other beds.

**How about compost and fertilizers?**

Dan: I don’t use any commercial fertilizers. I custom make my own nutrition compost using chicken manure, the pine shavings from the coop, and grass clippings and weeds. I just got a big, new barrel composter that turns with a crank. By the day of the tour it should be in operation. As a fall back, I purchase compost from the Waste & Recovery Center to use as mulch. I use compost as a mulch and mix it into the soil or planting hole when starting something new.

**What approach do you use for controlling diseases?** Dan: When I get moss rot, I cut it out. Otherwise, I haven’t had diseases to worry about. I think that when the soil is healthy enough, it all stays in balance.

**How do you handle weeds?** Dan: I pull, pull, pull and try to keep up with the weeds and not let them go to seed. Because I operate my business from this site, one challenge I have is bringing home weed seed on the heavy equipment. Unfortunately I have gotten some noxious weeds established here and pulling was just not working. I have brushed on glyphosate to help knock them back. I am hoping to be able to stop using the herbicide by the end of the year. They do seem to be under control now, even the horsetail, morning glory [bindweed] and Japanese Knotweed.

**What about pest control?** Dan: I’ve designed the chicken run to act as a slug fence between the woods and the garden. While the slugs have not been eliminated, they’ve been cut way back. I go out twice a week on slug patrol and slice any I find. This year I’ve also tried the iron phosphate slug bait, which has worked well. The chicken fence also serves to deter deer. My other big challenge is moles. The hills come up between the rocks. I haven’t found a good solution to the moles.

**How did you get interested in gardening?**

Dan: I’ve always been interested in the many fascinating life forms that are all around us, and in staying connected with basic resources, basic skills. Gardening is a basic survival skill even if we don’t currently depend on our home gardens for our food. I really value staying connected with the earth, with Gaia.

We talk about being grounded. The earth is part of that. For me, rock is at the core of that grounded feeling.

Interview by Jane Mountjoy-Venning