

Weldon and Barbara Neuschwanger's

gardens fill three city lots and illustrate the beauty an artist can create. Living here for 56 years, Weldon has designed and constructed luscious outdoor rooms, integrating curved paths and circular plantings with straight lines of wood edgings for visual interest. A gifted watercolorist, he has planted with the concepts of form, line, texture and color in mind. Often sketching in his gardens, he has sold many finished paintings to buyers both locally and abroad.

With an eye to providing good drainage, sun-warmed soil and adequate viewing of the landscape, Weldon used recycled concrete and bricks for the infrastructure of the planted areas. An avid gardener all his life, over the years he has introduced many unusual plants into his gardens. One is the Mexican white poppy. A gift to the couple 50 years ago, it was difficult to propagate and grows six feet high. A rare tree, the Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), came into Weldon's care in 1950 from seed collected in China in 1948 after the species was thought to have become extinct. There are many other exotics here as well as natives, including wild ginger, lily-of-the-valley, Pacific dogwood and *Epimedium*.

How many hours a week do you spend working in your gardens during the growing season? At the height of the season, I spend 40 to 50 hours each week on the property.

Practicing earth-friendly gardening techniques, how often do you water and what techniques do you use? I water the gardens when observation tells me the plants need water. Though the lawn is never watered, it remains alive all year because I don't over-fertilize it and I use a mulch mower, cutting it medium high, which gives it more hardiness. A hand-held open-end hose with finger control is my best tool for watering. In addition, a watering can dipped from one of my three rain barrels helps me reach specific plants. Incidentally, screens on the rain barrels suppress mosquito larvae.

What is your procedure for fertilizing? I always amend the soil at planting time and fertilize some plants in spring. All but one of the fertilizers I use is organic: liquid fish, alfalfa pellets, bone meal, sacked chicken and steer manure, homemade and purchased compost. The formula 10-20-20 is a

great help, too. I also sprinkle Epsom salts around the base of roses three times per year to add minerals in March, April and May.

Do you use compost? Yes. We compost our yard and kitchen waste separately and we also purchase compost. I use it to amend the flower beds at planting time and also as a top dressing.

How do you manage garden pests? For slugs, I use bait sparingly, as well as crushed eggshells. In addition, an effective spray I mix at home kills baby slugs. Use one part ammonia to two parts water and spray into the crowns of hostas and daylilies. Since we live in town, we don't have deer passing through. Fencing has eliminated dogs, so we only see the occasional cat, which isn't a problem. We don't encourage squirrels, as they destroy crocus, rhododendron and camellia buds.

How do you avoid plant diseases? I keep the garden free of debris to protect plants from disease. For mildew on plants, I spray a mixture of one tablespoon of baking soda to one quart of water on phlox, roses and squash. That formula is also effective for blackspot on roses. It's important to pick the black-spotted rose leaves and diseased camellia leaves and dispose of them. A product called "Simple Green," which is actually a liquid soap, can be diluted and sprayed on roses and dahlias to kill aphids. For scale on camellias, I use a Safer soap mixture, spraying as needed.

How do you handle weeds? Our dense plantings help avoid weeds. Barbara and I hand pull any weeds before they go to seed to keep them from spreading. Right now, my two weed problems are wild buttercup that came in with new soil, and ten varieties of ivy I mistakenly admired years ago for their form and texture.

Gardening is clearly a passion for this energetic, talented man. When asked why he gardens, Weldon replied, "Growing plants is a joy to me in that it provides fresh air, exercise, mental challenge, and refreshment for my soul. I particularly enjoy having people visit our gardens, and I look forward to sharing plants and cut flowers with both strangers and friends."

Interview by Sharon Moore