

**Christine and Dennis Peck's** 50-year old property was overgrown with huge rhododendrons and massive blackberry vines when they purchased it. "We even had alder saplings growing in our driveway," Christine says with a laugh. Over the last 20 years they have been transforming the area into a showcase for native and exotic plant species. They've recreated two-thirds of the original landscape to include a traditional Northwest garden, perennial beds, and an orchard with old apple trees, as well as plum, peach and Asian pear trees. You'll also see a dry river bed informally accented with grasses and native plants. Their newest creation is a woodland garden.

Christine says she and Dennis divide their outdoor tasks quite distinctly. She designs and plants the gardens; Dennis mows and constructs the hardscape. This year Dennis built a greenhouse for their large potted citrus trees. Originally from Australia, Christine grew up in a gardening family. Growing exotics from Australia in the Northwest climate is quite a challenge for her, Christine says. To expand their knowledge of plants, she and Dennis travel the world looking at gardens. Their grape arbor, for instance, was inspired by a similar one they saw in a Southern Turkish village.

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

Christine: This year we're gardening more intensively, so it may be two full days a week.

**How often do you water?** Christine: Different gardens require different watering schedules. We use timed sprinklers and soaker hoses for our new plantings. On average, during the hottest part of summer, we water our raised beds once a day for twenty minutes. We have a very wet site, so we don't water our lawn at all.

**What do you use for fertilizer?** Christine: I apply evergreen granules to the acid-loving plants like the rhodies, camellias and azaleas twice a year. The new plantings get fish fertilizer. Once a year we spread compost on all the gardens. I also apply systemic rose food in the spring and a manure mound around each rose bush in the fall.

**Do you compost?**

Dennis: Yes, we recently replaced the compost bins that we use for leaves and grass clippings. The woody prunings go to the compost facility at the Thurston County Waste & Recovery Center. We also

compost our kitchen waste. Worms break that down for us. Adding dirt and manure makes a nice compost. If we run out, we also purchase compost.

**How do you handle weeds?** Christine: We've learned that gardens can be self-sustaining. That is, the right ground covers naturally keep weeds down. Invasive weeds are pulled and put in the trash. Digging dandelions and weeding in winter also keeps weeds down the rest of the year. We've decided it's important to be somewhat philosophical about weeds. For example, moss is slowly taking over our lawn, but we think moss is prettier than lawn, anyway. I've come to accept marsh marigolds in the lawn by deciding they are a gorgeous yellow there.

**How do you avoid disease problems?**

Christine: We lost a gorgeous coral bark maple, which died of a fungus. Generally, we try to choose disease-resistant varieties and toss anything that is susceptible. Watching plants carefully and keeping the garden beds clean helps. We occasionally use a pesticide. Dennis: Living on Eld Inlet, we are aware of the dangers of these compounds and, with that in mind, we've evolved to using fewer chemicals than in the past.

**How do you handle pests?** Christine: Using crushed gravel in flower pots as a slug deterrent was not wholly successful. Though we put slug bait around our tomatoes and basil, I'm going to try Slugo, because it's non-toxic. I also use a knife on slugs. Occasional systemic rose food and interplanting with marigolds controls aphids. Our water sensor sprinkler and dog keep deer away.

Dennis: If we have a caterpillar infestation, we cut the whole branch and destroy it. Our biggest challenge is with raccoons and possums eating our table grapes. So far, we have no solution but to watch them enjoying themselves.

Both the Pecks clearly enjoy gardening. Christine says landscape design has always been a major interest of hers because she enjoys working with color, texture and form. The beauty and wildlife in the gardens is what attracts Dennis. "I love the birds," he says, "and Chris loves the plants." When asked what she most enjoys about gardening, Christine thinks a moment, then responds, "I like the constant nurturing that gardening requires. It really provides regenerative powers for the soul."