

Since **Mark and Sandy Spee** purchased their south-facing property 19 years ago, they've been re-designing and adding gardens to take advantage of their excellent sun exposure. They knew they wanted to keep the still-productive 80-year-old King apple tree, majestic 70-year-old Black Walnut trees, as well as original holly trees. They consulted a landscape designer who introduced curved garden beds and clusters of edible plants interspersed around the trees.

Touring the gardens today, visitors see evidence of Mark's lifelong interest in horticulture from his integration of edible plants, ornamental shrubs, flowering perennials, annuals he grows from seed, and vegetables. Raspberries, blueberries, huckleberries and herbs are all here for the eating. Harvested over the summer from their raised beds — built of non-treated cedar — are Walla Walla sweet onions, scallions, red-leaf lettuce, artichokes, sweet corn, garlic, tomatillos, rainbow chard, asparagus and yellow Finn potatoes. The colorful palette of blooming plants includes hydrangea, mallow, gayfeather, astilbe, hellebores, daisies, and pink yarrow. Completing the aesthetic picture is a shady arbor draped with intermingled clematis and climbing Queen Elizabeth roses.

How often do you water? I water weekly with soaker hoses for the gardens and sprinklers for the lawn. Based on my experience, I use timers I've set to assure sufficient water for soil penetration. Also, to conserve water, we planted our hill with two drought-tolerant varieties of heather as well as euonymus, all of which only require water every three to four weeks in summer.

How many hours per week do you spend working in your gardens? I'm out there at least 15 hours, possibly more.

What fertilizers do you use and how often do you apply them? For the vegetable beds and cane berries I apply composted manure every other year. At vegetable planting time I incorporate a vegetable fertilizer I mix myself from organic ingredients, using a recipe from the Territorial Seed catalogue. The lawn receives organic fertilizer in spring and fall. Though I'm working towards a completely earth-friendly approach to my land, I still use a non-organic commercial fertilizer on the ornamentals at planting time to save time mixing.

Do you use compost? Yes, we compost all our yard waste and kitchen waste together, which we then add to our vegetable beds as well as various flower gardens.

How do you handle garden pests? For slugs we place beer traps, homemade from nut jars. If the slugs are really problematic, we put out slug bait. For deer, we've found that fences around the roses aren't entirely successful. A motion-sensing light is fairly effective, as is a radio on our deck we tune to rock music. That combination seems to scare the deer away. The "gopher purge" mole repelling plants I tried were not successful. I also cover the blueberries with fruit-tree netting that rests on a frame to keep birds away.

Plant diseases can be a problem. How do you avoid or treat them in an earth-friendly way? Though we rarely see aphids, if we have an outbreak, we use a diluted soap and water spray. Since roses are prone to blackspot, I avoid overhead watering and use copper spray. Tomatoes should also never be watered from above. After trying many approaches for avoiding fungus on our melons, I finally gave up and no longer grow them in this climate. Our best solution for avoiding disease in the vegetable beds is to rotate all the crops every year on a five-year cycle.

How do you minimize weeds? My wife and sons help me hand weed the gardens and paths. I use lots of mulch on the gardens and keep the field south of us cut close during the weed season. A natural herbicide made of corn gluten, a corn syrup derivative, deters most weeds in the lawn when applied twice yearly.

Mark's enjoyment of plants is evident as he guides visitors through his property. When asked why he gardens, he replied, "I'm a physician, and, since I work with people all day, I find it therapeutic to get my hands in the dirt — digging, weeding and planting. I particularly enjoy watching plants mature to their flowering and fruiting stages. It all feels very creative. An added bonus for our family is that we appreciate walking through the gardens, cutting our many flower varieties for bouquets and harvesting vegetables, berries and herbs for dinner."

Interview by Sharon Moore