

Nancy and Gerry Tays began their gardening experience in 1996 as a creative solution to difficult landscape challenges. Their solutions are helping to restore habitat, diversity, and native plants along their wooded ravine.

A peaceful Zen garden was the response to poor drainage in the front yard. The grass was removed and a drainage system that includes a dry streambed was put in place. The garden incorporates shrubs with multi-textures, color, and form into graceful curved beds. A priority for the Tays was using many fruit-bearing shrubs to attract birds and wildlife. In addition, plants were selected to give some color no matter what the season. It seems like there is always something in bloom.

During heavy winter rains, the ravine slope had to be restored. An engineer was hired to build a retaining wall to hold back the crumbling bank. Ivy was removed and a blanket of jute netting was placed on the hillside. Native plants of huckleberry, Indian plum, and snowberry were planted to hold in the soil and prevent erosion. Ivy was also removed from large old-growth trees to ensure their continued good health.

On the view side of the home another slope was replaced with an engineered stone wall. This new landscaping space called for plants that could withstand the wind and hot sun. Rambling blackberry vines in the lower lot are slowly being removed and replaced with hardy low-maintenance shrubs that require little or no extra irrigation, provide privacy, and additional habitat for wildlife.

The next challenge was an ivy-covered bank behind the garage. Last year the ivy was removed and replaced with kinnikinnick, a slow-growing native ground cover. To fill in the gaps, seeds of nasturtiums were scattered for a fuller effect and for summer color. Above the bank Nancy planted a cottage garden with perennials and annuals that provide a riot of color and nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds.

It sounds like you attract wildlife to your yard. We have lots of birds and butterflies visit

us. We choose many plants with berries, seeds or nectar to attract wildlife, and it works! I enjoy sitting on the deck watching birds fly back and forth from the wooded ravine into our yard. It is a good feeling, to provide food and shelter for our birds and other wild creatures.

How many hours a week do you spend in your garden during the growing season? We spend between ten and twelve hours per week.

What do you do to take care of weeds? In the garden beds I just pull them. I try to avoid giving weeds a place by planting close together. In the lawn I use a weed puller. I keep a good top dressing of bark on the paths and then pull weeds that come up.

How do you water? We have a moisture gauge and only water when absolutely necessary. We try to give a deep soak and water less often to encourage deep roots. Soaker hoses along the front garden, driveway, and under the deck are used to conserve water. Sprinklers are used for the back lawn and garden during dry spells.

How about compost and fertilizers? Mature manure compost is placed on flowerbeds in the fall and a light mulch of bark chips is used in the spring. Fertilizer is used for rhodies, azaleas, and perennials and a commercial rose food is used on all of the roses.

What approach do you use for controlling diseases? The leaves from roses with black spot are picked and discarded. We try to avoid disease problems by watering plants at the proper time of day.

What about pest control? We have our two dogs and don't want to risk harming them, so we garden organically. We grow plants that attract good insects. Occasionally we have hosed off aphids with a strong spray of water. We have put fragrant bars of soap under some plants to deter deer. Our dogs also act as a deer deterrent.

What makes gardening satisfying for you? Seeing the results of our time, seeing the garden in bloom during summer's finest hours.

Interview by Cindy Fairbrook