

Secrets For Year-Round Visual Pleasure

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DRUMORE (Lancaster Co.)

— What's the secret for growing a gorgeous blooming flower garden?

"It starts with a soil test," said Ann Zemsky. "I can't stress that enough."

Surrounded with acres of blooming plants, the Zemskys' gardens offer breathtaking beauty.

It isn't without intensive labor, trial and error, and extensive reading that the Zemskys' gardens have become a visual delight.

"The secret is to have the right plant for the right place. Most problems stem by placing a plant in the wrong spot," Ann said of the need to differentiate between shade and sun-loving plants, and between dry and moist soil requirements.

About 25 years ago, when the Zemskys purchased the farm perched in the southern end of Lancaster County, the wooded land had already been cleared. But the land was so hilly that most of the topsoil had washed away and was not suitable for farming.

The slate soil was a gardener's nightmare. To remedy the soil, the Zemskys had truckloads of topsoil, mushroom soil, and compost brought in and mixed together and then soil tested.

"If you know you have acid soil, grow things that like it or amend it," Ann said.

The Zemskys had purchased the land to build a vacation getaway from their Philadelphia home. They left much of the land reforest itself naturally, and planted fruit and numerous other trees purchased through the conservation district's



The right plant in the right place is the secret to success.



Although the natural wooded habitat offers a wonderful view of wildlife, it also has drawbacks. Wildlife can quickly devour plants, buds, and vegetables.

annual sale.

Seven years ago, the Zemskys moved on the site permanently and began to establish flower beds.

Ann enrolled in the Penn State master gardener program.

"It's an excellent program," Ann said, one that has enabled her to design gardens using shrubs, perennials, ornamental grasses, and annuals to provide year-round color and pleasure for both birds and for the family.

"Consider your growing conditions," she said. Nonetheless, she often discovers the best spot through experimentation. Because it is considered more visually appealing to cluster plants in threes or uneven numbers, she will buy three of the same variety. Instead of planting them in the same area, she often plants flowers in three different spots to determine where they will do best. The next season, she will transplant the plants if they are not thriving.

Although the natural wooded habitat offers a wonderful view of wildlife, it certainly has its drawbacks for growing vegetables and flowers.

To discourage squirrels from digging up bulbs, the Zemskys place ground oyster shells around the bulbs when planting.

For 15 years the azalea bushes produced no blossoms because the deer nibbled the buds. Since the azaleas were moved to a new spot, they bloom profusely every year.

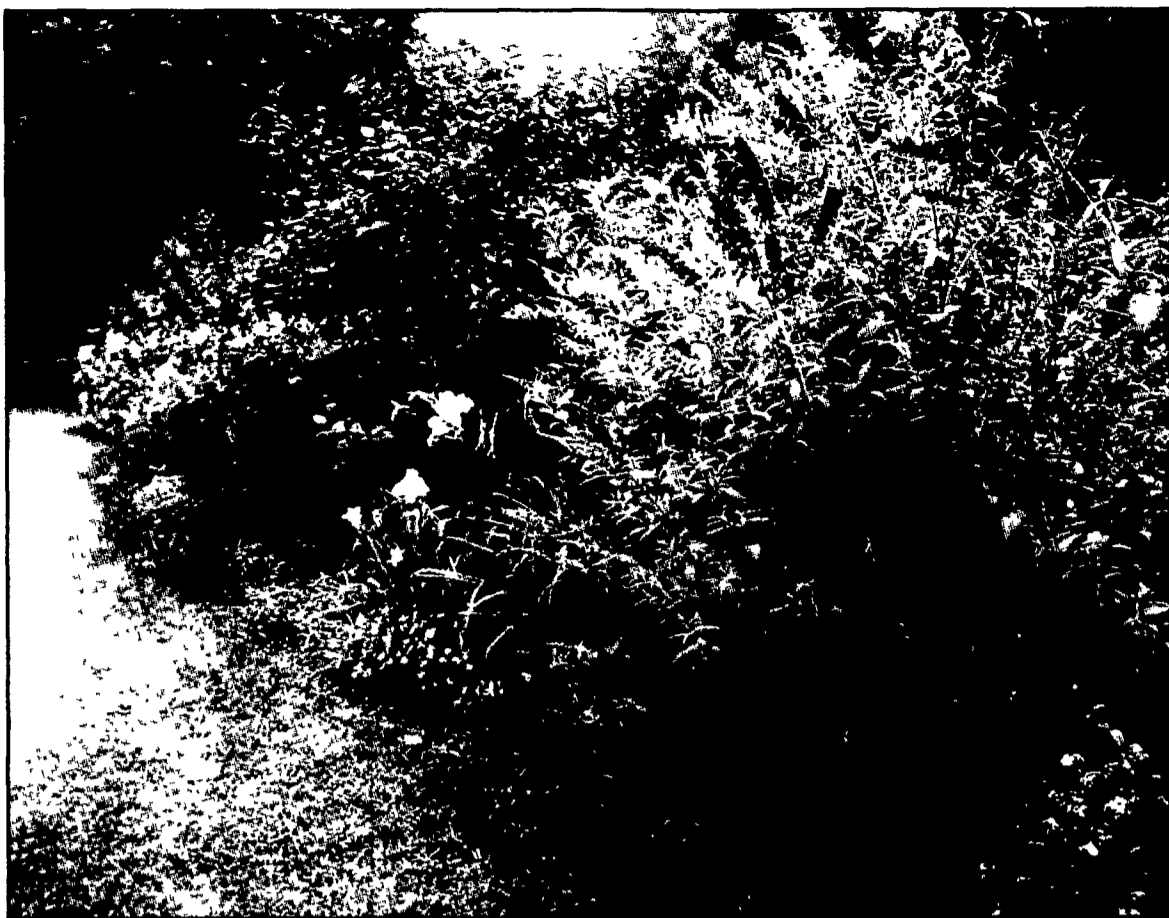
To protect raspberries from birds, Zemsky erected overhead netting. They needed to cover little trees such as the white oak, which deer consider "their ice cream."

Another consideration when plantings is to be aware that some trees such as black walnut trees are toxic to some plants, but beneficial to bee balm, day lilies, hostas, Japanese maples, and astilla.

Novice gardeners often make the mistake of planting shrubs and flowers around the house. When inside, they can't see a thing. The Zemskys planted their gardens to provide a breathtaking view from inside their home.

One of the largest areas is a 45x90-foot walled garden. This includes both vegetable and flowering plants. The walled garden keeps out deer, ground hogs, rabbits, and squirrels.

Ann tends to plant vegetables



Ann Zemsky draws a rough plot plan similar to a map to determine where perennials are planted. During the different seasons she jots notes on observations such as a spot that needs more color. This helps determine where and what is needed to make gardens visually appealing.

that are harder to find at roadside stands such as English-style cucumbers, Oriental soybeans, shallots, leeks, herbs, and greens.

"I'm big on IPM (integrated plant management)," Ann said.

established for a year, she will replant in a more permanent spot.

Another way to insert color and different size plantings in the garden is to use potted plants. Although they require



To delay blooms, prune a plant to half its size in June. In mass plantings, prune several of the plants but let others alone to extend flowering.

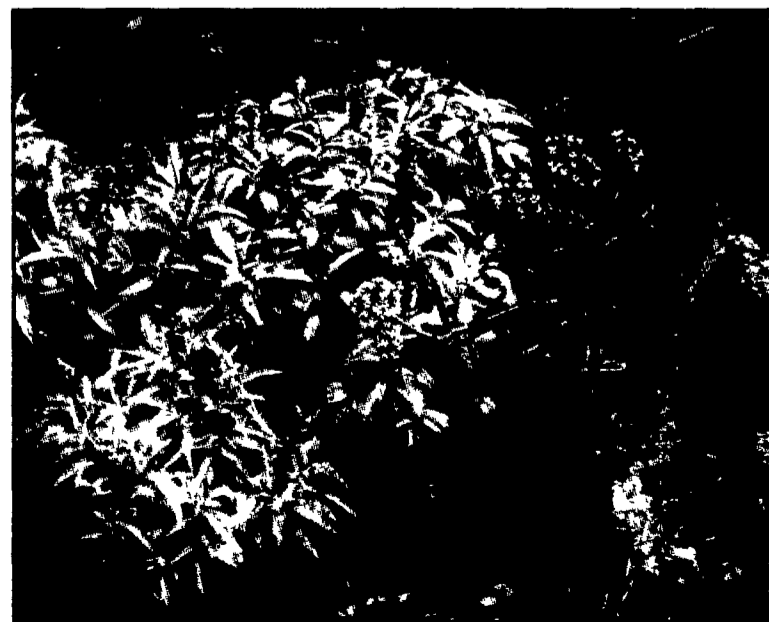
She strives to be an organic gardener but admits to bouts of frustration and resorting to occasional use of insecticides. She spends many hours hand picking off beetles and slugs from plants.

Ann and her husband are retired and Ann jokes that they are now full-time gardeners. She realizes they may not always be as agile in working among the gardens. In preparation of this stage, she is planting more flowering shrubs, which require less care. Clematis, which most people plant where it can climb, is allowed to grow throughout other plants that provide natural climbing support.

She uses butterfly bush cuttings as stakes for peas and other "Everybody should compost," Ann said. She and her husband devised a simple system of wiring together wooden pallets where grass, leaves, and kitchen waste can be chucked and composted in place.

Ann has what she calls a nursery bed to insert small plants that may become lost among bigger plants. After the plant is

more watering, the plants can be moved from spot to spot for light control and instant color in a foliage area. Pots can also be moved to a protected area to winterize. When replanting a plant that is pot bound, be sure to spread apart the roots or the plant will strangle itself.



A bubbler provides calming gurgling sounds. Most perennials need to be divided every three to five years. She gives them away and has also been the recipient of "pass-along plants," many of which she considers to be her favorites.



Ann Zemsky recommends the Penn State Master Gardener program to those interested in gardening.



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