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A Garden Symphony

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When Ruth Amdor was young, her mother saved a special spot in the garden just for her. Amdor, now 74, has carried that love of gardening and a green thumb with her ever since.

"Gardening feeds my soul. I don't know any better way to describe it," she said.

Amdor took a break from gardening to "grow kids" but dove headlong into an ongoing gardening project that began in 1995 when she had a home built in the Heights.

Lush Gardens

About a dozen flower beds sprawl along Amdor's property at 2136 Constellation Trail. The home is located on an upward sloping lot, which is ideal for the tiered retaining walls that hold the street-facing flower beds.

The gardens, which also wrap up the front of the driveway and into the backyard, are composed mainly of perennials, supplemented with trees and shrubs. Amdor adds annuals for a splash of color and character.

"I had a desire to start from a clean slate and develop something of beauty," she said. "I feel I'm out there doing God's work and I'm very much inspired by my mother's work and carrying that on."

In addition to being a full-time greenhouse employee at Gainan's downtown location, where she has worked for the past 10 years, Amdor spends every day tending to her flowerbeds. She describes gardening as a rewarding job and enjoys seeing the fruits of her labors and sharing that with others.

"People drive by or walk by and tell me how much they enjoy my yard and that means a lot to me," she said. "The pleasure and the joy in it far outweigh anything that I consider work."

Ongoing Process

Amdor was born and raised in Musselshell and owned a grocery store in Roundup. After selling the store, she moved to Billings in the spring of 1994 and began looking for a place to build her home.

"The whole process has been something I've always wanted to do - design and build a home," she said.

She had a landscape architect lay out the flower beds and create the tiered gardens in the front yard and along the north side of the home.

When developing the beds, Amdor spend several years experimenting with different plants. The trial and error process helped determine the best placement for specific plants, based on soil and light conditions.

"I'm motivated by the passion that I have for growing and learning," she said. "I don't get upset when something dies. I want to figure out why and put something in its place that works."

Soil Preparation

Upon starting the flower beds in the back of her home, Amdor began by digging down several feet, removing rocks as she went. The soil in the Heights is notoriously poor, so she was contending with shale, clay and plenty of rocks.

"I was determined to make good, healthy soil out of it," Amdor said. Most of the rocks she removed were the size of her hand, but she also removed boulders equivalent to the size of a vehicle wheel.

"I wanted to be persistent and methodical and do the process myself," she said. Once the bed was cleared, Amdor dug down 2-3 feet deeper, lining the trench with a couple inches of peat moss and fertilizer. She then repeated the process, topping the peat moss with dirt removed from the new trench.

Routine Maintenance

Every fall Amdor spreads more than 40 bags of compost on the top of her beds and works it in with a tined fork. This helps aerate the soil and inject nutrients.

In addition to the yearly task, she uses a spray-on fertilizer every 2-3 weeks.

Amdor has several bird baths throughout and prefers not to use herbicides in the gardens.

She counters the destruction deer and antelope cause with a mixture of egg and water, a trick learned from her mother. Spraying this every 2-3 weeks helps keeps the animals from eating the plants, but must be diligently applied, according to Amdor.

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