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Homeowner channels the metaphysical, imaginary and fanciful in her gardens

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Judith Knudson has a natural approach when it comes to gardening.

"Giving back to the earth is what the garden is all about," she said.

She has been gardening since moving to Billings in 2001 and purchasing her property at 2540 Virginia Lane.

The house, set back from Virginia Lane, is a modest abode, unassuming from the front. Around the back of the home unfolds about a half-acre of lush gardens filled with climbing vines, ferns and blooming flowers, surrounded by mature trees.

Her garden was featured on the Garden Tour in late June, sponsored by the Billings Preservation Society for the benefit of the Moss Mansion. At that time, she mentioned the garden was a bit slow this year, due to the cold weather. But by August, her gardens have matured into what she describes as a fairyland.

The gardens are composed of a multitude of perennials and annuals. Knudson is especially fond of the vines. She has perennial and annual vines, including morning-glory, black-eyed Susan, and more than 30 clematis.

Exploring the metaphysical

Knudson's relationship with plants developed when she read "The Secret Life of Plants," a book written in the 1970s by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird. The book describes the physical, emotional and spiritual relations between plants and their caregivers.

"A garden isn't just planting and tending. You have to talk to it and touch it. Plants can read your mind," said Knudson.

Further research brought her to writings on the Findhorn Gardens of Scotland, where lush foliage

blossomed from barren, sandy and wind-swept conditions. Garden founders say through a special relationship with the beings of nature the garden was able to grow.

Her gardener, Mary Anne Moos, shares Knudson's philosophy on plant relationships.

"I talk to them. I'm out here all day long. They're my best friends. I tell them all how pretty they are," said Moos.

Knudson has also found inspiration from Machaelle Small Wright's book, "Behaving as if the God in All Life Mattered."

Small Wright is considered a spiritual pioneer with an ability to see and hear the invisible forces of nature. The book dictates her story, from a childhood of torment and isolation to discovery of her ability to communicate with the world of nature spirits, or "devas."

Knudson has been seeking her own garden devas. She believes that devas pull together a plant's energy to establish color, size, taste and other plant spirits.

Taking time to sit

Often Knudson will sit on her patio, admiring the grounds. She unplugs the phone and just sits, letting the garden "minister" to her.

In such solitude, the property has a whimsical, wild look. Yellows of the sunflowers meld with the bright pinks and oranges of the zinnias, highlighting the subtleness of the silver lace.

"If you can't sit ... " she said, trailing off. "This is a refuge. I like the silence."

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