

## COVER STORY

## CREATIVITY BLOOMS IN GARDENS

STORY BY MARTY FIGLEY • SPECIAL WRITER

**On the cover:**  
A cascade of water begins in the fountain pond to connect the series of ponds at the home of Jack and Mary Lou Susami. Flowering annuals add a bright note while field-stone surrounds each pond.

**In containers:**  
Many different kinds of containers overflow at Eric Hoffer's residence in Birmingham.



**Fountain treat:**  
A view from the largest pond, looking up to the "fountain pond" created by Jack Susami.



Each garden that I visit always amazes me with the ingenuity and thought that the gardener has used in planning, planting and caring for his or her creation. It is so refreshing to see gardens that don't "follow the book" yet are done very nicely to suit the land on which they are built.

Two very different approaches to gardening illustrate just what I mean.

Many different plants grow on a small suburban lot, 50 by 100 feet, in Birmingham. The owner, Eric Hoffer, began his garden just last year and has accomplished much in just one season.

He began by tearing down a porch and replacing it with a deck at the back of his home. He then built a raised bed from landscape timbers and abutted it close to the new deck, leaving space in between for roses to climb on the adjoining trellis.

The trellis adds a vertical element to the garden. He then removed all the sparse grass in the back yard and simply turned over the soil, brought in topsoil and compost and added sulphur, cottonseed meal and green sand. This mixture was worked into the soil to raise the pH level that was indicated by the soil analysis he did.

Wood chip paths edged with grapefruit-sized cobblestones meander around the yard and around a center flower bed.

"Like any good gardener, I like to recycle things, so when my neighbor had some broken concrete I used it for another raised bed," Hoffer said.

**Harmony**

Hoffer looked for sunny places in the yard and positioned the new deckside garden in that place.

Here he planted low ground covers toward the front, along Silver mounth, geraniums and many rock garden plants, such as *Oreocarya* and *Hebe*.

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grass" and harmonizes well there.

The property has a row of hemlocks at the back, which serves as a perfect privacy fence. Walking from the garage to the deck, or into the back yard, visitors are guided through an arbor that he also constructed.

This gardener also makes trough gardens, after he saw them in England and "fell in love with them."

"They were a little difficult at first, but now I store all the ingredients together so I can make them more quickly."

Many containers are filled with plants, such as thyme in a strawberry pot and sedum in another, and geraniums with ornamental grass.

He uses Fafard No. 52 soil for all the outdoor containers, which he buys at Telly's in Troy. For regular pots he adds water-absorbing crystals that allow the soil to retain moisture. For the trough gardens he combines chicken grits with the soil (one part of each), which he buys at Uncle Lukes in Troy. He finds that these sharp pieces guarantee sharp drainage.

He also took advantage of a bad pruning job that was done on a large hornbeam by pruning all the green branches off and using the one-half-inch branches to form a twig structure in the shape of an obelisk. Eventually clematis vines will cover this structure, as they will on the row of hemlocks.

Eric and his brother, Jonathan, will release the premier issue of *Michigan Gardener*, a magazine that focuses on Michigan gardening, in May. Copies can be picked up free at more than 200 locations in the tri-county area. Look for it at your favorite garden center.

**Ponds**

In Livonia, Jack Susami has constructed a series of ponds on his suburban lot, starting with a small, pre-formed pond.

After the family visited Ameriflora in Columbus in 1992 and saw ponds and a waterfall, Susami said, "Wouldn't that be wonderful? I'm going to do that next spring," and he began to fulfill his dream.

He then constructed a "fountain pond" eight by eight feet in size and 16 inches deep, which is joined by a waterfall to another pond 22 inches deep, which is joined by a waterfall to a stream that connects to the large pond, 12 by 24 feet in size and dug 25 inches deep. A filter system takes up six inches, leaving the pond depth at 19 inches. This large pond recirculates the water.

Because the kids like to catch tadpoles the pond is only seven inches deep at the edges with a 12-foot wide shelf.

The six-inch space in the large pond is taken up with the underground filter system, a series of PVC plumbing pipes with holes drilled, which is connected to the pump inlet. This is then topped with six inches of pea gravel. The water is recycled to provide a continuous flow.

At the upper end of the fountain pond a patio of paving bricks holds a café table and chairs where Susami and his



**On deck:** An alpine garden abuts the deck; the trellis is ready for climbing roses in Hoffer's garden.

wife, Mary Lou, enjoy morning coffee. Along one edge Junipers have been planted and will soon provide a privacy screen. He plans to add a trellis above the bricks to provide shade. A bench has been placed at the end of the series of ponds so the family can enjoy the fish such as Koi, resplendent in a variety of colors such as orange, red, black, copper and gold; Shubunkins, colored a mottled mixture of red, blue, brown, black and white; and Fantails, with shiny red bodies. They are fed Koi food "sometimes" in the summer. The Koi add another dimension to this pond experience as they enjoy being petted.

Susami has devised a form of treated lumber to anchor the pond to the ground. The ponds are all lined with commercial pond liner and are edged with field-stone boulders. Annuals such as ageratum, impatiens, alyssum and moss rose add color to the scene, which he says is his recreation. Situated strategically throughout the landscape is a weeping spruce, Japanese lace purple-leaf maple, and "my favorite, a slow-growing tri-colored beech."

"The frogs croaking in the spring is music to my ears," Mary Lou said. "I love sitting on the patio with morning coffee."

The family has enjoyed the dragonflies, garden snakes, many birds and other wildlife that visit. They once saw a blue heron. In the winter a bubbler keeps an area from freezing, which guarantees fresh water for the fish. Sometimes mourning doves stop by for a refreshing drink.

Susami has planted hardy water lilies to provide shade for the fish, which live in the water year round. When I asked about maintenance, he said, "The hardest job for the pond is cleaning the matted leaves from the bottom in the spring."