

cover story



Made in the shade: A corner of Betty Trost's garden is filled with shade-loving hostas and other plants. Photos by Marty Figley.

Artistic area: Alpine plants take center stage in this small area of the garden.



A lesson in gardening: The way it should be

BY MARTY FIGLEY
Special Writer

A stroll through her garden with Betty Trost of Bloomfield Hills is a lesson about the way gardening should be done. I spent a delightful hour with this generous lady and learned a lot about her gardening practices. By the way, she volunteers countless hours at Cranbrook Gardens and has done so for many years.

As you enter the garden through a hand-wrought gate, a large Hornbeam tree, *Cornus betulus*, with interesting gray bark has an under planting of Hostas in shades of gold and green foliage. Lady's mantle, *Alchemilla vulgaris*, also grows here keeping company with a handsome euonymus. Both have chartreuse blooms and the euonymus extends the season with the same color seed pods when the blooms are gone. A lavender-blooming clematis climbs up one corner area.

Shades of green foliage is repeated across the deck area where blue princess holly, *Ilex*, junipers, *Juniperus*, Sherwood spruce, *Picea*, rhododendrons and pines, *Pinus mugo*, provide a restful backdrop to the northwest corner of the home.

As the seasons have come and gone, the garden has changed and she says, "This was a July/August garden when it was sunny, but now as the trees have matured, shade is a consideration. Now it is basically a spring garden and at this point is a garden of textures. There is one big Silver Maple tree, *Acer*, in the center of the back garden that provides much shade and has long roots that reach out into the garden beds. That is something I save to contend with."

The large area, which she and her husband, Norm, can enjoy from the house, contains "billions" of blue forget-me-nots, *Myosotis*, and pink and white tulips, *Tulipa*, in the spring. Basically, throughout the year, the garden colors are pink, white, gray and maroon. In early spring glory of snow, *Chionodoxa*, fills the bed, followed with billows of the blue forget-me-nots. White blooming spiraea and a double gold kerria which has chartreuse stems throughout the year, peegee hydrangeas and white fothergillas add interest. Also, pink sidalcea, which self sows freely and has

blooms like miniature holly-hocks, and sedum "autumn joy" are all growing happily in their chosen location.

Betty often repositions the plants in this garden to suit herself and likes those that have a "see-through" quality when the late afternoon sun shows them at their best.

Clumps of gray lamb's ears, *Stachys byzantina*, outline the edges of the garden and the sedum, sand cherries, *Prunus besseyi*, a bushy shrub, and a smoke tree, *Cotinus coggygria*, provide the maroon shades. The smoke tree is kept cut back to keep it in scale, therefore it doesn't bloom. Several big double pink carefree beauty roses are growing on either side of the smoke tree and make a nice contrast.

Near the back of the garden, "my all time favorite" is a witch hazel, *Hamamelis* "Arnold Promise" which has delicate yellow blooms in February and March "for five weeks!" She told me this plant is related to another member of the *Hamamelidaceae* family *Parrotia persica*, a small tree which grows nearby and has exciting bright fall foliage. Fothergilla is also in this family and it, too, is quite colorful in the fall season.

When the saponaria (soapworts), asters and phlox have grown tall and before they flower, she cuts half the stems off about half way and lets the rest of them remain long. This way bloom time is considerably increased.

In September and October the fall aster, *Asteraceae* "Alma Potschke" will bloom with vibrant reddish-vermillion blossoms. Betty says, "It knocks your eye out." Some of the same flowers growing in this garden are also grown in her holding area - or her cut and share garden. Saponaria (bouncing bet), daisies, yarrow, feverfew, *Chrysanthemum parthenium*, fountain grass and cut-leaf violets, *Viola*, are just a few. Both of these beds have tall shrubs in the back.

Another view the couple likes to enjoy from their home is a heavenly blue morning glory, *Ipomoea*, vine which is growing over a 20-foot tall mock orange, *Philadelphus*, shrub. She also enjoys a lace leaf viburnum and a barberry, *Berberis*, which has yellow racemes and yellow flowers and berries that begin as yellow and turn reddish in the fall. At that time of year the leaves turn a "fiery beautiful red," adding another dimension to the garden.

Betty's philosophy is to "find what does well and grow it. A wise gardener takes a common plant and learns how

to treat it." For instance, she digs up some of the plants in the spring when they are six inches high, disturbs the roots, and then puts them back down in the ground. The result is straight stems so no staking is necessary. Yarrow, achillea roses, and saponaria, or anything that is aggressive can be treated in this manner. At that time, the plants can also be divided.

In a shady, quiet corner, another vignette appears and can also be seen from the house. Here are several evergreens such as Norway Spruce, and tucked back in the center is a pedestal. Betty says, "People often asked, 'what are you going to put on it?' and I tell them there is nothing to figure out, it just adds to a quiet texture." A hand-made heart-shaped bird bath setting on the ground invites these friends into the garden and the Christmas ferns, *Polystichum acrostichoides*, and Japanese painted ferns, *Athyrium niponicum*, grow nearby. Large rocks are positioned alongside the Japanese painted ferns to shade their roots and to hold moisture in the ground. A 25-year-old crabapple, *Malus* 'red jade' tree adds an anchor to the garden.

Along the back brick fence, and in other areas of the garden, perennial lirope grows to 12 inches tall. It forms a dark green low hedge-like effect and makes a wonderful backdrop for other plants. Betty says, "People don't use it enough; it holds the soil. It is cut back early in the spring to about two inches and then needs no other care."

A rock garden filled with tufa rocks is filled with many plants. Betty says, "This area has been the same for 30 years and the loss of an old crabapple tree, which was destroyed by ice last winter, makes it necessary to remove the shade lovers and add those that need more sun."

In addition to all this, a large shady area in the front of the Trost home is a spectacular sight in the spring as it blooms with many varieties of wildflowers. I hope to share this special garden with you at a later time.

ON THE COVER

A *Euonymus* has been trained to grow as an espaliered specimen in the Bloomfield Hills garden of Betty Trost.