

# Canton gardener works on nature's terms

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI  
SPECIAL WRITER

Ray Van Hoeck takes a philosophical approach to gardening. He believes it should be done at a leisurely pace and on nature's terms.

"You don't have to win or lose," he said. "If I have a grand plan, it is that if possible, I try to have continual blooming throughout the season."

This year, because of the mild winter, snow drops started peeking up from the dirt in January; crocus appeared in March; daffodils took center stage in April before the show really began with tulips, azaleas and rhododendrons.

The best is yet to come. Van Hoeck's 60 to 70 varieties of daylilies are most prolific in summer, providing a rainbow of yellows, oranges, pinks and chartreuse. He describes his yard as a potpourri of plants.

"There's something of almost everything," Van Hoeck said.

His efforts will be on display, among five other gardens, during the fourth annual Canton Garden Walk 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, June 29. Tickets are \$6 before the day of the walk and \$7 June 29. They are available at three businesses in Plymouth: Vanessa's Flowers, Backyard Birds and Grayes Greenhouse; and two in Canton: Keller & Stein and Mary's Farm Market.

Sponsored by the Canton Garden Club, which started in 1996 and has grown to 70 members, the garden walk gives participants a close-up view of all kinds of gardening techniques and terrain.

"We have people backing up to woods and have all shade and others who have all sun," said Sue Kluz, Canton Garden Walk co-chairperson.

"We're all dealing with critters

and some people are dealing with deer," she said.

Aside from having to contend with the largely clay soil conditions in Canton; animals that sometimes think the planted flowers are catered-free-for-all; and the sensitivity of some plants; gardening is therapeutic, Kluz said.

## Survival of the fittest

Van Hoeck follows the survival-of-the-fittest principle when he adds a plant to his garden.

If it's too finicky about what it eats and weather conditions, he prefers not to have it at all. Van Hoeck considers azaleas, for instance, a pain, because they require acidic soil.

"Daylilies are the closest thing to a trouble-free plant that I've grown," he said. "Hardy hibiscus are also fairly spectacular in my garden."

In fact, some of the hibiscus were transplants from the Redford home he and his wife, Maggie, moved from 25 years ago. Van Hoeck grew some of the hibiscus from seed.

He likes to grow a lot of his annuals from seeds, because he can find a greater variety "and many of the oddballs" that are hard or impossible to find already grown. He starts them under lights in his basement as early as February and places them on his patio when the danger of frost is past.

Van Hoeck also has a small vegetable garden, featuring tomatoes and peppers, which he also started from seed.

If someone had the energy to count every flower, bulb and plant in his garden (which measures 60 feet wide and 120 feet deep), Van Hoeck's best estimate is that it's in the thousands. Consider, for instance, that he buys 100 daffodil bulbs every spring.

## Orderly

"I make the maximum use of the yard," he said, referring to the beds that extend around the perimeter of the house. Other flower mounds are set strategically apart by the grass in the middle of the yard. He describes his work as "orderly."

"I think male gardeners want to be orderly," he said. "Women seem to be more free-flowing and imaginative."

Maggie enjoys the garden, Van Hoeck said, but she would rather spend her time making quilts.

One of the few male members of the Canton Garden Club, Van Hoeck said he has recently started to appreciate the design of leaves and that he likes to take time to study their style and texture.

Retired from National Bank of Detroit eight years ago, Van Hoeck started gardening when he was 18.

"Over the years (his interest) has gotten bigger and bigger as

I've gotten older," he said. "It's a lot of fun and you can take it at a leisurely pace. There aren't many things you can do that have so many rewards and so few threats."

If a plant dies, he said, that's part of the overall expectation.

## Garden club

The Canton Garden Walk, which usually raises about \$1,000 annually, is the group's biggest event. Members are considering various ways to put some of the money back into community projects.

This year the Canton Garden Club planted red and white begonias and blue ageratum outside the Canton Library twice. The first batch was decimated by frost.

"We want to become more community oriented and reach out to

do more in the community," Kluz said.

The club was started by Kathy Israel and Lin Jones, "who didn't expect so many people" to join, Kluz said. "A lot of people like to grow in Canton and we've been growing ever since."

The age of club members varies, but they all share a love of flowers, said Kluz. The group also sponsors perennial flower exchanges and provides speakers on different topics of interest at meetings the second Tuesday of the month.

"Growing flowers is wonderful," Kluz said. "It's a tremendous amount of work and it really soothes the soul."

Call Canton Garden Club member Judy Bloomquist at (734) 455-8283 for more information about the walk and club.



STAFF PHOTO BY KATY BARDON

Cultivating: When Ray Van Hoeck moved into his home the backyard was a cow pasture. He has grown most of his perennials from seed.

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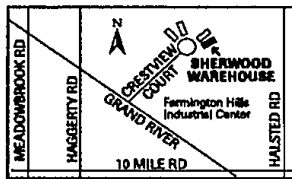
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