

GARDENING

This beautiful garden appeals to everyone with its variety

GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

In early spring, two varieties of Virginia bluebells fill the beds in Linda and Martin Vitanda's front garden in Troy.

As the bluebells die down, wild columbine with orange and yellow blooms fill in, followed by many hostas. Forty roses add much color. This is just a preview of the large wildflower garden in the back yard.

A natural ravine features two small water gardens that Linda's daughter, Marion (then 12 years old), dug, bought the liners and helped build at Mother's Day present. Bright yellow swamp marigolds and other wildflowers fill the area. Future plans include a waterfall and larger pond.

Masses of flowers

Early this month, masses of the same bluebells, which make a sea of blue, filled the beds along with many white trilliums and other varieties. Many of the plants came from Linda's mother's home in southern Ohio.

As these masses of flowers die down, other plants fill in, which changes the scene to purple (phlox), then the green of hostas. Other plants such as large heart-leaved European wild ginger, columbine, tiny Greek veronica, Solomon's seal, a rare goldenseal, true and false Solomon's seal and rue anemone fill the extensive beds.

There are also toothwort, wood poppy, May apples, a rare white trout lily, showy ladies' slipper and many more. Linda shared a list of plants that she grows and it numbers more than 70!

In addition to the wildflowers, she grows more than 250 hostas

and 250 daylilies.

"Some people believe a particular Jack-in-the-pulpit is rare — I've got tons of them," she said.

A variety of violets and pink, white and purple heptacaps bloomed earlier.

Vines such as clematis, bitter-sweet, Dutchman's pipe and climbing hydrangea clamor over trellises and arbors.

Personal touches

One arbor faces the Sunshine Garden ("It's so restful to sit here," Linda said). The arbor, which Martin built, is a duplicate of one she liked on McKinnin. This garden also features the bell from her old grade school in Ohio.

Other themes are the Fairy, Bird House and Children's Garden, an area for her 10-year-old daughter, Marianna. It contains a playhouse that Linda had painted and her own little garden.

Linda's love of plants came from walks with her father on the farm where she grew up.

She remembers picking bouquets of wildflowers for her mother.

Many, many garden accessories and clever things adorn the garden and add her own personal touch. Linda has placed them so you have to really look to see the surprises that are so clever.

Meandering stepping stones — one of which is her master gardener stone — lead through the garden.

A side garden contains many other wildflowers. Three very tall trees — oak, maple and white oak — are festooned with ivy growing up the trunk.

"It was an invasive ground cover and I wanted to have flowers, so I used an upholstery staple gun and stapled it to the trees," Linda said.

It is now lush.

Care

When the family moved here in 1985, the area was completely overgrown. Little by little they

cleared it out.

"The bare ground looked awful and I said, 'I've got to do something,'" Linda said.

So they went to her mother's in Ohio and started bringing plants home. Martin turned the soil over by hand and Linda planted. As they worked, she realized they had a perfect soil for natural growth.

Because of the intense plantings and a sprinkling system, there is very little care necessary to this well-established, shady garden. Tall, mature trees provide the shade.

When leaves fall they are left in the beds until spring. Then Linda removes those that haven't broken down, and Martin vacuums them up and mulches them in a chipper.

A wild swamp rose covers part of the backyard fence and bleeding heart marches around the other sides. Many flowering shrubs in yellow, pink, orange, etc. are planted along the back

edge.

"I planted so people walking by would have something to see," Linda said.

They can also peek through and enjoy the colorful flowers.

Last year, the garden was awarded "Best Shade Garden in the City of Troy."

Linda's interest in wildflowers doesn't stop in her own back yard.

When she saw the DNR planting wildflowers in the Upper Peninsula, she said, "How about along I-75? People have to go through the city of Troy to get up north."

So it was done, thanks to her.

Look for the roadside wildflowers along I-75 from Big Beaver Road to 19 Mile.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

May is time to sharpen the gardening tools

GUEST GARDENER



DONALD VAN KIRK

If you put off getting your gardening tools and lawn equipment in shape, now is the time to get them ready to work for you.

First, check the handles of shovels, rakes, edgers and hand tools for cracks or missing pieces. It's cheaper to replace them than have them break in the middle of a big job.

Check the cutting edges of tools for sharpness. Many gardeners forget that the edges get dull with use. Now is the time to file them to a sharp edge with a heavy-duty file. If you forget to wash and wipe cutting surfaces with oil before putting them away last winter, take a little emery cloth and sand off the rust, wipe clean and then oil the work.

Lawn mowers need oil changed, filters replaced, both air and oil and bearings greased. Blades sharpened, or replaced if worn down. The same should be done with gas or electric edgers.

Your pruners, loppers and hand saws need to be sharpened but also wiped down with alcohol to prevent any diseases from last year's cleanup to be carried over to this year.

Check compost

You may not have had time or energy to check your compost pile. If you see earthworms around the edges of the pile and none inside, as you peel away the layers and it's hot inside, let it cook.

Squeeze the compost. If it's a moist as a damp sponge, then it's wet enough. If it's wet, open the pile to the sun or add brown material. If it's dry, add some green material or add water but don't drown it (either method will work).

If you don't need large

amounts of compost or it's too much work to keep a compost pile, you may want to consider worm composting. All you need is a plastic bin, moistened, cut-up newspapers, ground limestone or well-crushed eggshells every few months and a few handfuls of soil. Worms also like fruit and vegetable scraps, everything except greasy leftovers.

Donald Van Kirk lives in Dearborn and recently completed his master gardener certification. The Observer Newspapers will be running occasional guest columns from area gardeners.

Clinics help with DIY projects

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