

# GARDENING

## Backyard garden holds surprises amid pleasure

### GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIGLEY

Emanuel Abela of Troy retired in 2000 and has been busy with his gardening endeavors ever since. Oftentimes there are surprises in backyards that aren't seen by passersby.

His garden is proof of that. At the edge of a cement patio, Emanuel constructed a garden that is both pleasing and innovative, which he calls the rock garden. After the grass was removed, the soil was leveled before planting began. A tall board fence serves as a perfect backdrop for the garden and holds trellises for white planters. Two tall evergreens grow at the end of this garden with a water fountain featured nearby.

A beautiful hibiscus blooms with bright pink blossoms, adding a bright spot to the corner. Another white hibiscus grows close by. Emanuel edged his garden with 12-inch brick pavers to give it more prominence. Marigolds, tall lilies, geraniums, and purple and white flowers add color. Two trellises sport vines with purple blooms. Emanuel has filled different kinds of planters with an array of flowers. For instance, the strawberry jar at his feet in the photo is surrounded by white abnsum. It is filled with the succulent Hens-and-Chicks.



MARTY FIGLEY

Proud gardener: Emanuel Abela is proud of his garden, designed and planted after he retired.

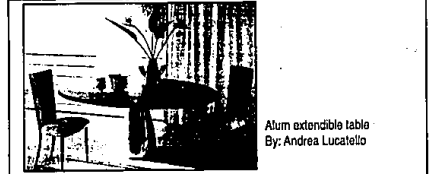
On either side of a tall wrought-iron arch at another edge of the patio, two angels stand amid succulents with a large hanging planter of deep pink and purple Million Bells petunias above them. One angel is a little girl, the other a little boy. "My wife Maggie loves angels," Emanuel said. Several more angel figures are strategically placed along with whimsical ones, such as a panda bear, deer, a windmill and a bird-bath. Around the edges of the yard are colorful plants with several bird feeders and birdhouses that entice birds to the yard. Nearby is a small pond that the couple built together. It is a source of much pleasure and also loved by the birds. Watering each day took about an hour. Miracle-Gro fertilizer was used. When fall cleanup time arrives, the beautiful hibiscus is cut down to the ground; it comes up each year. "It is very easy to care for," Maggie said.

Benches and chairs sit on the patio so that the couple can easily enjoy their garden. Emanuel was a winner in our High Hopes Sunflower Contest last summer, with a plant that was 13 feet, 2 inches tall. Many gardens are small and sometimes present a challenge when designed. Peter Loewer, author of *The New Small Garden* (Stackpole Books), has five garden maxims for such a design: 1. Plan for the eventual size of a plant. Visualize what it will become five or 10 years from the day you plant it. 2. Match the plant to the conditions. A bush that requires perfect drainage won't be happy in heavy clay. 3. Avoid straight lines unless you're planting in an area that has a direct relationship to an adjoining building. They are never found in nature and soon become boring to look at and impossible to maintain. A gentle

and sweeping curve looks much better and is easier both to install and to keep up. 4. Break the rules. Although all the books tell you to put the large plants at the back of the border or garden area, then slot the medium plants for the middle, and place the shortest in the front, there are times and places to try the unexpected. Put a tall plant at the front, for example, so its stems can artfully drape over the smaller plants, lending an air of mystery to the border. 5. Trust your own aesthetic judgment. After all, it is your garden and should reflect your likes and dislikes, not those of some expert you don't even know and would never invite home to dinner.

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.

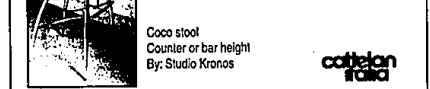
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