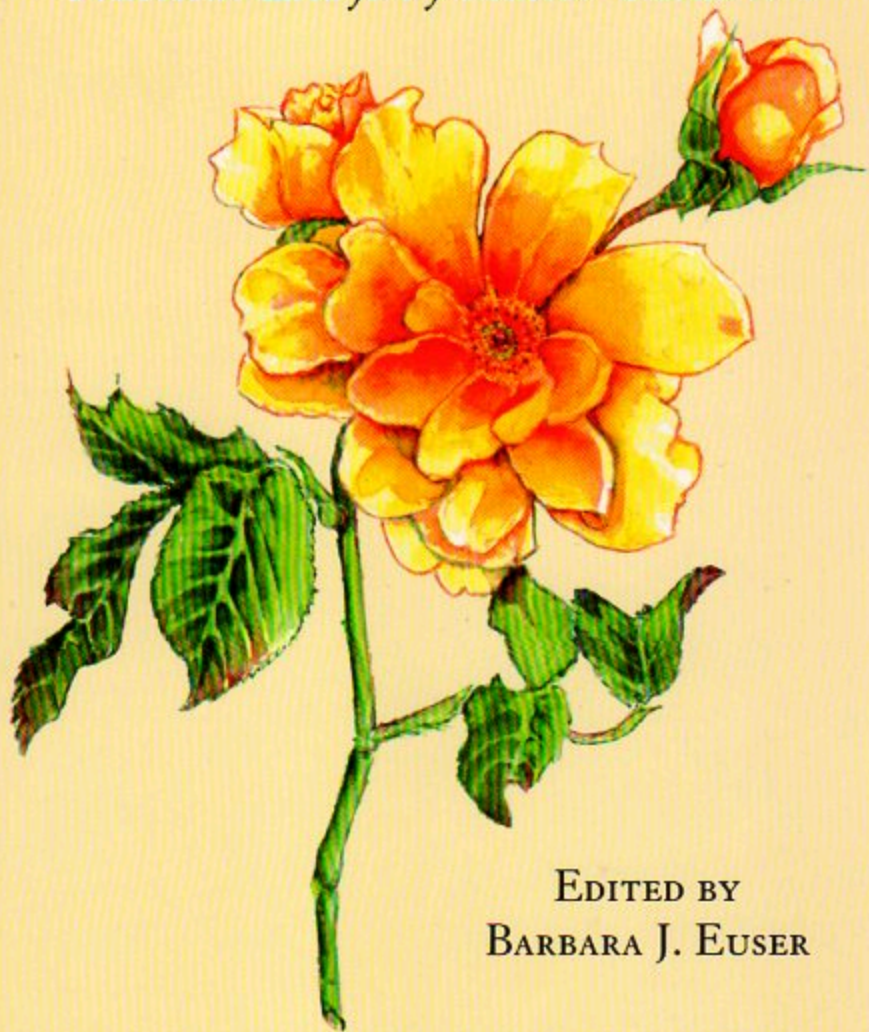


Gardening

AMONG FRIENDS

Practical Essays by Master Gardeners



EDITED BY
BARBARA J. EUSER

"Like chatting with garden gurus...delightful and informative!"
—Elizabeth Murray, author of *Cultivating Sacred Space: Gardening for the Soul*

The Evolution of a Family Garden



BY ANITA JONES

When designing a garden you are lucky if you get to start with a clean slate. Our Novato home was six years old when we moved in and although the slate wasn't completely clean—we had mostly lawn, a few trees and some insignificant perennials—it was a relief not to have large areas of unwanted plants to rip out.

As first time homeowners, having never grown much beyond the obligatory potted philodendron years ago in college, ficus and ferns in apartments along the way, and roses in pots on the deck of the San Rafael townhouse we rented before buying, my husband and I were both novice gardeners. We were eager to lay brand new shovels to our very own soil.

In October, we moved in and began work in earnest the following March. My husband produced an aerial view map of the property to scale showing the footprint of the house and existing trees and shrubs. We used copies of this to experiment with various layouts. I signed up for Master Gardener training.

Our daughter was three years old when we moved in, so we needed a family garden—something for everyone with room to grow. Our goals included a play area with some lawn, herb and vegetable beds, flower beds, a child's garden, shade, nooks for sitting and entertaining and a site saved for the future garden shed.

We focused our attention first on the rectangular, south facing back garden, simultaneously designing the play area, adjacent beds and the child's garden. The site for one of the beds came with a dramatic backdrop: a row of five redwood trees that stand in our neighbor's yard lining the forty year-old grape stake fence we share. A priority in the back yard was shade. Most often we based our choice of trees on advice from people with garden conditions similar to ours

who had thriving trees we liked. Among our choices are eastern redbud, crepe myrtle, Chinese scholar tree, Santa Rosa plum and red leaf Japanese maple. My husband built an arbor in the southwest corner and we planted a different vine at each post. The first summer—as we awaited the promised shade—I painted a large canvas with designs echoing those of the lawn furniture and this formed a fine shade canopy.

The play area called for removing a fifteen by twenty-five foot area of sod and replacing it with sand and a large redwood play structure. We relocated the sod to the front yard where we'd planned a large berm. Had we known then what we know now, we would never have done this. For cosmetic reasons the previous owner tilled the weeds and laid new sod over them. The weed seeds lay in wait beneath our new berm. Seven years later we are still fighting the transplanted weeds and sod.

In the north facing front garden, along the entire length of the split rail fence we share with our neighbor, a misguided honeysuckle vine had been forced to grow as a hedge. This was our biggest challenge months later when we decided to remove all of it, showcasing the handsome fence.

For vegetables and cutting flowers in the narrow east garden, we built three triangular raised beds. The morning sun makes this the ideal place for our potting bench.

The west garden, also narrow, we call the living room. Here we planted an oval rose garden defined by an Idaho quartz path that leads through the gate to the front and in the other direction to the arbor. Redwood Adirondack chairs sit in a corner well-shaded now by the maturing Japanese maple. During the month of May the living room is transformed for our annual May Festival. We plant the maypole in the center of the rose garden and for a month the garden is alive with music and dancing children as they rehearse and perform traditional dances.

Planting was a backbreaking task. Every hole had to be carved out of the hardpan clay that covers the property and the soil amended. Over the years, my husband has dug down deep enough

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Gardens Can Keep Memories Alive



BY ANITA JONES

Four years ago my daughter and her friends were swinging and playing in our Novato garden, as I clunked around in knee-high rubber boots working in a nearby flowerbed. The squeak-squeak of the swing sent me to the garage for that handy can of oil spray. It also sent my head spinning into a *dejá vu*: I saw myself forty years before swinging on the rusty swing set of my Georgia childhood, my father clunking around in knee-high boots working in his garden. The squeak-squeak of my swing sent him to fetch the can of thick, dark grease used for this purpose.

Seven years ago I knelt between our white Adirondack chairs planting a stand of gladiolus bulbs (*Gladiolus grandiflora*) when I was interrupted by an important phone call relaying sad news, the death of a friend who had breast cancer. Each year when those yellow gladioli bloom they flood me with memories of my friend—playing volleyball, raising her daughter—before she fell ill.

Fifteen years ago in the garden of our home in Albany, Georgia, my late mother planted a bed with vibrant pink phlox (*Phlox maculata* 'Alpha'). Every year since, they've come back strong. In memory of her I planted the same variety in our California garden.

Gardens help us keep memories alive. Sometimes it happens quite serendipitously—as with my squeaking swing story—but we don't have to wait for *dejá vu*. We can approach the garden with full intentions of making it a living vessel for memories. We can use the garden to blow the trumpet and beat the drum for past and present events and loved ones. Here are four ways to design your garden with memories in mind:

~ Garden Design ~

ART PIECES

In our garden we have two patinaed relics of days gone by. One is a bronze Adidas tennis shoe—a wonderful gate-stop—and the other is a bronze Viking helmet, both artifacts from my husband's college days. Unfortunately things went terribly wrong during the pouring of his bronze Viking bust and the helmet is all that survived. It makes for colorful storytelling with visitors to our garden. Nestled in a bed of day lilies we have a ceramic casserole, hand-thrown by my husband. Open the lid and reveal sand and shells from our honeymoon seventeen years ago in Kauai. Doubling as a piece of playful art, this weather-proof exhibition case keeps the contents clean and dry waiting to reward whoever is curious (or nostalgic) enough to take a peek at our tropical souvenirs.

PLANTS

The stand of yellow gladioli and the bright pink phlox harbor fond memories of my friend and my mother. A flowering cherry tree (*Prunus*) we planted in memory of my late sister is a beautiful tribute to her in the early spring when in full bloom. However, my husband's longing to have the scent of common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) from his Wisconsin childhood will never be realized in our northern California garden. Our winters are too warm. Therein also lies a caution: don't allow your romantic notions of certain plants blur your ecological responsibility. Before planting, check to be sure you are not choosing an invasive non-native that should not be planted in your climate zone.

GARDEN FURNITURE, TOOLS AND PROPS

A weathered 1960s lawn chair from the porch of my family home and my late father's antique garden tools make this is an area where whimsy meets memento in our garden. A favorite prop, which is only brought out during special occasions in the garden, is my refurbished childhood Schwinn, circa 1964.

~ Garden Design ~

to hit the dark, loamy soil that reminds us that this land was once a walnut orchard.

To complete our goals, three years ago my husband built the 8-by-12-foot shed. More of an artist studio, it houses a potters' wheel, sink with running water, shelves and a workbench. Like families, gardens are ever-changing, reflecting our whims and filling our needs. So much work has gone into the making of our garden, sometimes we have to remind ourselves to sit in the shade and let the garden give back to us.