



# A bloom WITH COLOR

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Master Gardeners share a tour of their gardens and tips for better blooms

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An ancient Chinese Proverb says, "Life begins the day you start a garden." For casual gardeners, that day is the day they make a trip to their favorite nursery for their annuals, where they buy the same kinds of plants each year. But, for the expert whose life revolves around their garden, the more variety the better. For them, spring and summer gardening is the time of year when life is at its best.

Mentally, they begin preparing their gardens during the winter when their garden plots are frozen under layers of snow. Some are cultivating new plants and seedlings in their greenhouses and mapping out new garden landscape plans. If they are Penn State Master Gardeners, they are busily volunteering throughout the community by teaching garden classes and inspiring others to take up their beloved craft. Some are also planning for summer beautification projects in their communities.

By Anita L. Fordyce • Photography by Casey Martin





Color and creativity abound in Connie Holland's gardens (above). "I have an eclectic approach to my plantings," she says; A man-made stream and more than 1,000 daylilies (opposite) set Carolyn Black's and Charlie Gomer's gardens apart from others.



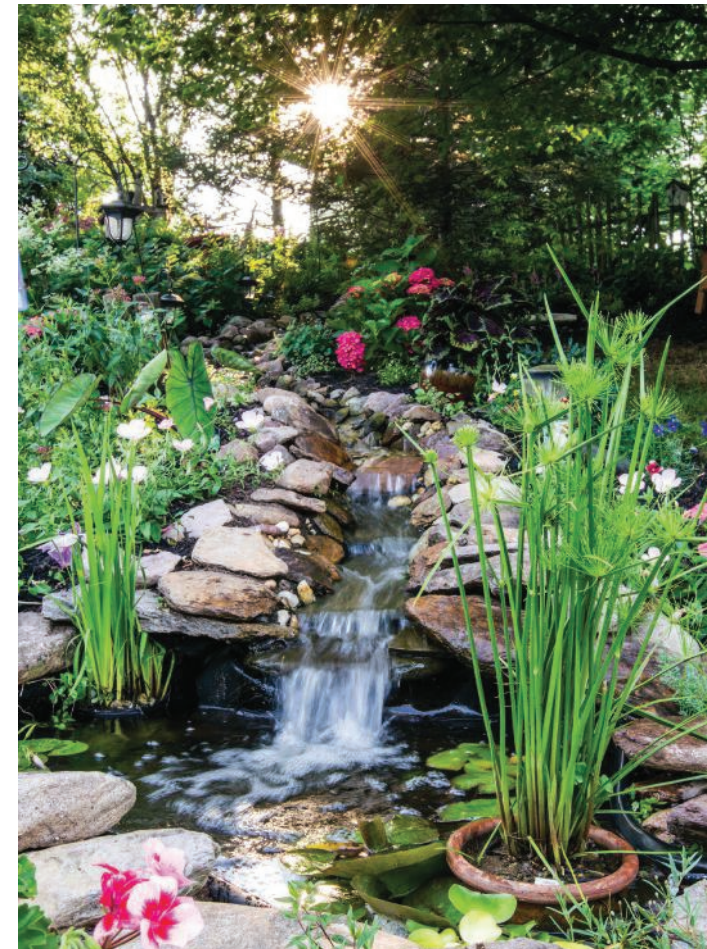
Penn State Master Gardeners are volunteers who support Penn State Cooperative Extension's educational programs in consumer horticulture. They develop their horticultural expertise by attending Penn State educational programs. Some started out just wanting to know how to enhance their gardens but eventually took the 50-hour Master Gardeners program. Today, some of them have prize-winning gardens blooming throughout Adams County.

### A Garden Bedded in History

Connie Holland has one of those gardens. As a Penn State Master Gardener for Adams County, she volunteers hundreds of hours at local events, is a member of the Gettysburg and Biglerville Garden Clubs, writes for the *Gettysburg Times*, and conducts numerous workshops. She is chair of the South Mountain horticultural fair and is in charge of set-up for the York Flower Show, where 14 different garden clubs participate.

A walk in her garden is a walk in history, because she and her husband live on the edge of the Gettysburg Battlefield. Their property, which they purchased after they retired, is adjacent to the 88-acre George Spangler Farm, site of the 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Army Field Hospital. Directly across from the front porch of their log cabin home is General Meade's headquarters.

While Holland and her husband (a licensed tour guide) are dedicated to preserving the battlefield, Holland's goal for their



property was to enhance it with gardens. While managing the building of their house, she worked for a year to prepare the garden plots, beginning with a foundation of rich soil 1-foot deep. She shopped for a specific type of soil and held it for a year until her house was completed. She renews the soil each year with mushroom compost (her favorite gardening tip), keeping the soil rich for her beloved plants.

Adding to the color and personality in the gardens are vintage lightning rods, a hand plow, a rusting hay mower once used by the park service, and various colorful containers. Some of her flowers are recognizable, but others have exotic and impressive names, hailing from places like Australia and Japan.

Holland loves sharing her gardening knowledge and gardens, which are often featured on local garden tours and bed-and-breakfast tours. When she thinks about gardening as a lifelong passion, she chuckles and says she's always amazed that people pay money to see her gardens.

"I have an eclectic approach to my plantings and rock hardscape," she says. "My gardens go through color phases. The spring purple phase transitions into colorful fox glove and onto other color schemes throughout the summer," which is obvious to her visitors.

Walking with Holland through her gardens, it's hard not to feel her admiration for each plant. She calls them by horticultural *and* pet names. But, does talking to them really



help? "No," she answers, "but I threaten them if they don't do well." She might not think so, but a glance around her gardens says they listen.

### More Than 1,000 Daylilies

In 2006, Charlie Gomer retired from Gettysburg Area High School. In search of a way to serve his community and meet new people, he signed up for the Penn State Master Gardeners course after reading about it in the newspaper. "I never dreamed of where being a Master Gardener would take me," Gomer says. "Master Gardeners volunteer specific hours each year to community service, which is sharing our gardening knowledge. Little did I dream it would lead to growing more than 1,000 daylilies."

At a Master Gardeners meeting, a speaker shared daylily photos. Gomer was immediately smitten by their different colors and amazed at the diverse varieties. In 2008, he began collecting them and today has more than 1,000. One of his most prized daylilies, which he protects in a large cage, is valued at \$200.

The word "daylily" is a derivative of the Greek word, *Hemerocallis*, which means beauty for a day, but the plant's multiple buds produce many flowers. "It is therefore possible to have daylilies blooming in your garden from the beginning of June until the end of September," Gomer says.

On his 15-acre parcel of property neighboring Little Round Top, Gomer and his wife, Anne, start each day by drinking



their morning coffee while walking through their gardens to see which lilies are blooming. Charlie is an expert in hybridizing, or crossbreeding, to produce new varieties of lilies. Some of his varieties look like an artist has applied unique paintbrush strokes, with rarely any two being the same. He sees details that only an expert can see.

"Daylilies are the perfect perennial for gardeners and will grow freely without pests or disease," he says. He recommends picking a location with at least six hours of sun, amending the soil, and choosing interesting cultivars (plants) as there are thousands to choose from. Then, water heavily in the spring for the best blooms.

A member of the American Hemerocallis Society and the Free State Daylily Society of Baltimore, Charlie also suggests visiting an American Hemerocallis display garden to see the wide variety of daylily options.

### No Stop or Start to the Seasons

A blanket of colorful gardens hems Carolyn Black's home. Tucked in a special spot is a little plaque that describes the scene well: "The secret to my garden is but one word, 'love.'"

Black is soft-spoken upon first introductions, but excitement fills her voice when showing her variety of perennials, annuals, and lovely container gardens. They're an inspiration to her. She says she sees God in the textures, varieties, and fragrances of

flowers and plants. "Since God planted the first garden, I know there are gardens in heaven," she smiles.

Black has always enjoyed gardening, but when she and her husband, Keith, became empty nesters, redirecting their time into gardening filled that void. Today, she has six personalized gardens. Some contain memorabilia reminding her of family memories, personalized and dedicated to loved ones. One garden has two hand plows that act as trellises for hyacinth bean vines to climb, reminding her of her dad's gardens. She also has a Grandma Hope garden, which is planted with her grandmother's favorite flowers.

The main garden has a small man-made stream. After a visit to a garden show, Keith, also an amateur photographer, saw this idea and built it into the main garden. This garden also provides a haven to birds and other wildlife, which the Blacks love to watch throughout the winter months. Additionally, it gives Keith some great photography opportunities.

To ensure color in the winter, the garden contains blue spruce, evergreens, and hollies. Birdhouses, where families nest every year, and feeders also adorn the landscape. More than ornamental, these housed at least four new bird families last season.


Carolyn, who works fulltime, admits that she spends every spare moment digging, weeding, and trying new perennials. "But, I love it," she says. "My newest obsession is hydrangeas. I have 19 of them. I enjoy designing with texture and color. In

late June, the hydrangeas, hybrid tea roses, knock out roses, coneflowers, rudbeckias, summer phlox, yarrow, Asiatic lilies, and many perennials bloom."

She enjoys looking out her family room window and seeing color year-round. When there is a lull during the summer, her best gardening tip is to mix in containers of blooming plants into your gardens.

When Carolyn's grandson was three years old, he was diagnosed with Type I diabetes. As a result, her gardens also provide a way to volunteer in fundraising for Juvenile Diabetes Research. She holds garden tours in support of him. She also holds garden tours for her church and others. Carolyn, also a Master Gardener, particularly loves volunteering with the Master Gardeners children's program, where she teaches children about gardening and agriculture after school.

Passionate gardeners cannot begin to list the values and benefits their gardens give them because it is their life. When it is your life's passion, there is no stop or start to the seasons. When their gardens are resting, they find opportunities to nurture and share their garden knowledge with others.

Local garden clubs and Penn State Master Gardeners courses offer numerous classes throughout the year, so others may learn their craft as well. Holland and Carolyn agree that gardening fulfills an inner passion that can only be filled with digging in the soil of a garden. 

Connie Holland (below, L-R) waters her plants, which she affectionately calls by their horticultural and pet names; There's no lack for greenery or daylilies on Charlie Gomer's property; Succulents add to the color and personality of Holland's gardens; In addition to his daylilies, Gomer owns more than 20 peacocks.

