

SHOW US YOUR GARDEN MONTHLY SERIES

Splendorous space

Fort Worth couple's back yard invites visitors to explore, relax, find peace

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Author: ALYSON WARD, award@star-telegram.com

When you step into Kathy and Harold Saburn's back yard, you can't see it all at once. There's no expanse of green grass, no empty space lined by manicured flower beds. Instead, the garden is a glorious hodgepodge, and the space is divided into close, cozy sections that feel like a series of rooms. We take a closer look at this delightfully disordered space in our monthly Show Us Your Garden series.

The gardeners: It's considered Kathy's garden; Harold does the design and construction work. "He takes my ideas and turns them into reality," Kathy says.

The couple met in Athens, Greece, in 1973. They have lived in their home in far west Fort Worth since 1980, not long after they moved here when the Air Force stationed Harold at Carswell. When they arrived, the back yard was empty, so they had to create their garden from scratch. Over the years, the Saburns have transformed it into a joyfully untamed space full of color and life.

The highlights: The garden is an appealing jumble of flowers, trees, animals and painted signs. The entire space is divided "into little rooms," as Kathy describes it. A vegetable garden offers Swiss chard, tomatoes, beans, potatoes, cucumbers, blackberries and more. A covered deck is adorned with trumpet vine and overflowing baskets of petunias. A "treehouse" is a small terrace atop a storage building that offers a resting place among the treetops. Scattered throughout the yard are signs: "Hope," "Happiness is Being," "Live Life Joyfully." And numerous sitting, conversation and napping spots are scattered among them.

The yard is thick with trees of all sizes. Peach, fig and pear are closer to the house. Nearby are magnolia and rose of Sharon; a small cafe table is shaded by the branches of a mulberry. Toward the back, there's a lemon tree that produced 47 lemons last year.

The garden invites you to explore. Step down from the deck, and you're in an entirely new area, a breezy dining nook. Duck under an arbor and a new section unfolds, a stone path curving into a tangle of trees. Along the way, fountains bubble and splash; dogs bark; wind chimes tinkle. It's a garden that envelops and encloses you, leading you along paths and into one section after another. It's a place to explore and a place to feel at peace.

Gardening philosophy: Kathy's been gardening since she was a little girl. "As I was growing up in Greece, we didn't have much," she says, "but I did have a little patch of garden."

She has been planting things and watching them grow ever since, and that has given her a kinship with nature. Kathy's love for flowers is such that she doesn't like pulling them out of the ground - "to me they're like little people," she says. That's why last year, when moonflower vines took over her vegetable garden, she let it happen. She's permissive with her plants, allowing things to grow. And throughout the yard are animals: The Saburns have three dogs, three cats, two birds (named Loud and Louder), three chickens and a bunny named T.J. With so many plants and animals, there's no way to control everything. The live-and-let-grow philosophy, then, makes for a happy chaos.

Lessons learned: The garden can be a place of peace, a chance to surround yourself with the things you love. And for the Saburns, that means not having a cookie-cutter yard.

"I have to have things around that feed the senses," Kathy says. Besides the tangle of flowers and trees, her personal touch is evident everywhere. She has painted flowers on the stone walkway that leads through the yard, on benches and chairs throughout the yard, and on the fence. "LOVE" is in bright red letters on the fence.

"It is nothing fancy, nothing HGTV," she says. "But it's what I like."

The garden's benefits: Narrow steps lead up to the treehouse on top of the storage shed. "I like to come up here and meditate, to sunbathe and to be with the trees," Kathy says.

Throughout the garden, little swings, benches and chairs are tucked away, offering spaces for rest or conversation. Surrounded by plants and beautiful things, the Saburns have a place to stop, enjoy and be part of nature.

"This place," Kathy says, looking around, "will just make you feel connected to the spirit of the universe."

ALYSON WARD, 817-390-7988