



SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Wednesday, July 25, 2018

SEARCH


[Home](#) | [Local](#) | [Sports](#) | [Nation/World](#) | [Editorials](#) | [Opinions-Letters](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Special Publications](#) | [Archives](#)

Life

Home » Life



Bookmark



Print



+ Text



- Text

MASTER GARDEN of SANTA BARBARA COUNTY: Companion planting

Dynamic duo really digs gardening together

Jean and Bill Howard, Santa Barbara, By LINDA SULLIVAN BAITY, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

June 16, 2018 5:53 AM

If Bill and Jean Howard had a theme song, it would undoubtedly be the Jule Styne/Stephen Sondheim classic show tune "Together, Wherever We Go" — a sentiment that pervades all aspects of the long and happy lives they've shared with one another for nearly half a century. Celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary this month, the Howards still spend most of their time together, whether traveling the world, spoiling their grandchildren or giving back to the community that has given them so much.

The couple built their contemporary hilltop hideaway eight years ago on the very same spot where Mr. Howard lived for much of his youth. It's also where he was living when he and his future wife first met at UCSB, so the location holds deep personal meaning for them both. It's no surprise then that after retiring from their careers as educators in Orange County, they made a beeline back to Santa Barbara to begin the next chapter of their ongoing love story.

Gardening is one of their favorite joint activities, especially since Mr. Howard became a UC Master Gardener in 2014.

"I remember growing corn with my parents as a kid," he recalls, "but I always knew there was so much more I needed to learn. For instance, I didn't have a clue about plant pests or diseases or that I might actually be able to do something to prevent them."

Mrs. Howard agrees that her best gardening buddy is now much more methodical about researching while she is more likely to experiment and take a few chances.

Share Story



Tweet



A geometric grid contains the front yard "secret garden" of edibles and succulents.
LINDA SULLIVAN BAITY PHOTOS



Jule Styne/Stephen Sondheim

Translate Website



Select Language ▼

Powered by Google Translate

Related Stories

- Letters: Time for politicians to take financial hit
[ARCHIVE](#) Mar 10, 2011
- Backyard bounty
[ARCHIVE](#) Nov 18, 2017
- GARDEN GONE WILD!
[ARCHIVE](#) May 13, 2017
- Letters: Accounting for wages, benefits
[ARCHIVE](#) Sep 27, 2009
- Letters : Not quite home sweet home
[ARCHIVE](#) Aug 15, 2013
- Letters : Electronic tether to Big Brother
[ARCHIVE](#) Aug 7, 2012
- Letters: Electronic tether to Big Brother
[ARCHIVE](#) Jul 7, 2012
- LOCALLY, BILL DRAWS MIXED REACTION
[ARCHIVE](#) Aug 21, 2003
- Letters: Primer for parents of college students
[ARCHIVE](#) Sep 23, 2010
- Living in Armonia

"We complement each other," she says. "Bill is in charge of growing fruits and vegetables, composting and irrigation, and I take care of my roses, deal with the design of our garden, and I also get to decide which plants to buy."

"She's also in charge of weeding and clean-up duties," adds Mr. Howard, "and we co-parent the herbs."

Their lot is a manageable one-fifth of an acre, with a large portion of the ultra-low-maintenance landscaping devoted to hard surfaces, gravel mulch and decomposed granite walkways. Tucked behind a street-side stucco wall is a semi-secret garden that occupies the totality of their front yard. A distinctive geometric pattern of square, rectangular and triangular planting beds are filled with edibles and succulents. Containers of blueberry bushes sit beneath a sheer layer of bird netting to protect the ripening berries from being harvested prematurely. Two circular bamboo trellises will soon be covered with vines of string beans and Persian cucumbers sprouting around their bases, and a Mission fig tree furnishes the couple and all of their friends with more than 50 pounds of sweet, luscious fruit each year.

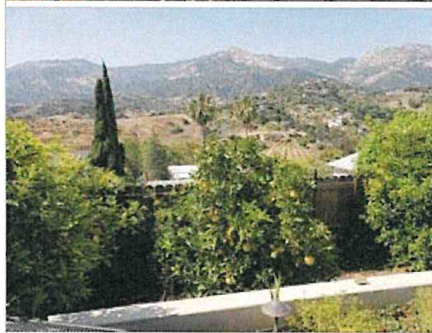
Tomatoes are another favorite crop for Mr. Howard, who plants a wide variety of both heirloom and traditional varieties, including Early Girl, Gold Medal, Madame Marmande, Juliet, Sun Gold, Better Boy and, new this year, Momotaro.

"I always lose a few tomato plants each year, so I've learned to put in more than I need. I make sure they get seven to eight hours of sun daily, I water them only once a week, and at the end of each season, I leave a few of the hardiest bushes in the ground instead of pulling them out. Santa Barbara is just the right climate to winter them over until they start growing again once it warms up again in the spring."

The Howards are proponents of integrated pest control methods that are safe and sustainable. Fish emulsion fertilizer, horticultural oils, organic soil conditioners and compost are applied to edibles and ornamentals alike. Even Mrs. Howard's 'Iceberg' floribunda roses flourish on a chemical-free regimen.

"I'm careful to water them in the morning to avoid mildew, and I water out around the drip lines rather than just around the base of each bush. For aphids, I spray them off with water or if I'm in need of a little therapy, I squish 'em with my fingers!"

In addition to her cherished roses, Mrs. Howard fancies blooming perennials such as pelargonium, lavender, sweet pea shrub, camellias, salvia and a frilly yellow honeysuckle. From her volunteer work at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden ("It's a quick 10-minute walk from our house"), where she developed a liking for California natives, she has incorporated foothill penstemon, verbena 'De la Mina' and coyote mint into her plant palette, with plans to add more natives soon.



Top photo, foothill penstemon is one of Jean Howard's favorite California native plants. Center, an eye-popping "Sticks of Fire" euphorbia greets visitors at the front gate.

Bottom photo, from the terrace, a stunning view of Lauro Canyon and the mountains beyond.

The couple's "joint custody" herb garden features Greek oregano, lemon thyme, rosemary, mint, sage, basil, cilantro and parsley. Most of the herbs are either planted in containers mingling with potted succulents and orchids, while others are planted in a raised bed partially shaded by the garage. One notable exception is borage, a vigorous annual herb that reseeds itself without fail every year. Mr. Howard plants borage next to his tomatoes because not only is it thought to repel the dreaded tomato hornworm, it also attracts loads of beneficial pollinators who are drawn to its bright blue flowers.

Due to the distinct downward slope of the Howards' backyard, there is a sizeable difference between the elevation of the house and the rear property line. The couple capitalized on this troublesome topological feature by flattening out the land beyond the terrace and planting dwarf and semi-dwarf citrus trees in the freshly graded planting strip. The result of this ingenious solution to a common problem is that the treetops are at just the right height for easy picking from the terrace yet they are low enough so as not to obscure the couple's magnificent view of Lauro Canyon and the Santa Ynez mountain range in the distance.



Top photo, a native bumblebee snacks on a blue borage blossom.

Top photo, a charming collection of potted succulents are grouped together because "plants need friends."

The Howards are a dynamic duo in the garden. Individually, they are smart, creative and accomplished, but together they're an absolute force of nature.

Go Team Howard!

email: life@newspress.com

Linda Sullivan Baity is program coordinator for the UC Master Gardeners of Santa Barbara County. Do you have questions about your home garden for the Master Gardeners? Contact the Helpline by calling 893-3485 or emailing anrmgsb@ucanr.edu. To find more gardening resources, go tocesantabarbara.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener or www.facebook.com/sbmastergardeners.