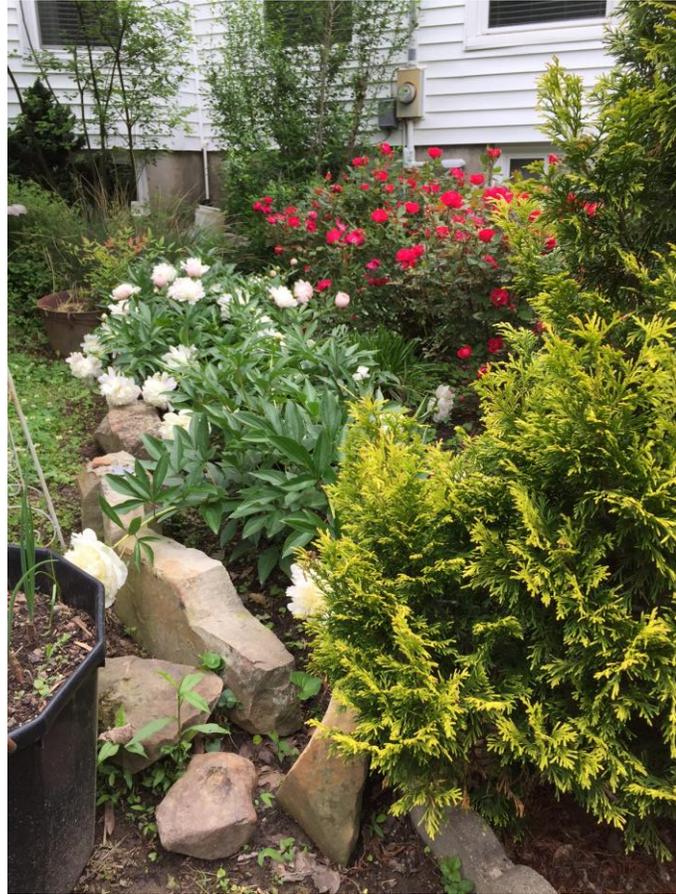


The Gardens of
Mickie and Don Hudson
by Tanya Stewart

This year's Garden Tour, a biennial fundraiser for the Berea Arts Council, features six amazing creations. One of the three new gardens open for the tour this year belongs to Mickie and Don Hudson.



Once upon a time---2005, actually---there was a shabby, but still proud, three-story Edwardian house on Berea's Jackson Street. Its new owners, the Hudsons, had just begun its renovation, uncovering the rich interior oak molding under chipped layers of paint, repairing the wood floors, repainting the walls, raising retaining walls, building a garage and driveway, and generally restoring a grand and kindly lady to her former splendor. If the work devoted to the house promised and eventually provided a welcoming home, the property on which it sat emphatically did not. A scraggly rose bush, a couple of scruffy evergreen bushes, and the odd indeterminate shrub comprised the border around the house's immediate perimeter. And the back yard? A forest wilderness choked with invasive honeysuckle, privet, and other vines, that dared any aspiring gardener to subdue it.

It would be after her retirement, in 2009, before Mickie, assisted by her husband, took shears and weed whacker in hand to do battle for a backyard garden. "It took five summers to clear it," she recalls, "enough to where we could walk without stumbling over trees and vines." Taking down dead trees, but leaving the healthy ones to stand, they shaped a shady forest glade, with spaces to entertain guests, play with grandchildren, possibly grow a vegetable garden, and simply to

daydream. "Varmint" neighbors from adjoining wild groves enjoy it as well: deer, foxes, raccoons, skunks and garter snakes.

"I wanted to look out the upstairs windows and be able to see a focal point---especially in back," says Mickie. "Wherever you look, there's a small garden." Accordingly, she planned her garden to have year-round color. Winter color comes from "Winter Red" winterberry, holly, and evergreens; she uses the delicate fronds of Japanese cedar and broad, shiny, magnolia leaves for interior Christmas decor. Hellebore is the first to greet the spring light, followed by narcissi and different varieties of daffodils, peonies with their bright fragrances of rose and citrus, buttercream-colored irises, and the first red roses. Summer has the most lush and brilliant regalia of all, provided by canna lilies, Asiatic lilies, red balloon flowers, zinnias, liatris, phlox, daylilies, and geraniums ("Deer don't seem to bother them," says Mickie.) Japanese anemones, a late summer deer delicacy, are protected by wire cages. Chrysanthemums and asters add to autumn color. At the front and one sunny side of the house, Mickie lays in a cover crop of crimson clover---"green fertilizer," as she calls it---to renew depleted soil in the garden.

It's taken Mickie five sweaty, achy, years to get her garden to its present state, with the occasional re-do. "I'd like to get it to the point of just maintenance, but I'm not there yet," she says. "I'd like to get more evergreens for the back, and shrubs to line the path." Will her Cinderella garden ever reach the point of "just maintenance"? Mickie Hudson shakes her head knowingly. "Neat and prim is not what I want. I like surprise."

To see this and five more spectacular gardens on May 21, contact the Berea Arts Council at [859-985-9317](tel:859-985-9317). Tickets are \$12 if purchased by May 19 or \$15 on May 21 at the BAC or any of the gardens.