

Three Members, Three Passions

By Denise Cowie

MANY A NATURE LOVER HANGS A BAT HOUSE IN THE GARDEN to attract these fascinating nocturnal creatures. But how many gardeners would be willing to adapt the top floor of their homes to accommodate bats?

That's what Judy and Dan Bauer did when they began converting a 260-year-old gristmill in Stockertown, PA into a showcase house and garden.

"The bats were here when we moved in," says Judy, so the couple insulated their fourth floor to allow the bats continued access to a space between walls and roof. It's a mutually beneficial arrangement. Because of the moisture generated by a four-acre lake in a quarry next door, the damp soil along the old mill tailrace, and the Little Bushkill Creek that runs through the Lehigh Valley property, there's no shortage of mosquitoes.

"So the bats take care of the mosquitoes," she says, and they also provide a bountiful harvest of soil-enriching guano, the bats' gift to gardeners. "I send it to my sister-in-law for Christmas, to use on her plants, and she loves it."

Judy adds the organic soil amendment to her own pots of annuals, too, but not to the extensive gardens that cover most of the four-acre grounds surrounding the mill. Those gardens thrive partly thanks to good soil and partly because she, like all three gardeners profiled here, embraces the dictum "right plant/right place."

Judy Bauer, Gail Seeley, and Paula Squitiere have more than a century's

worth of gardening experience among them, and all would give similar advice to new gardeners: learn about the cultural requirements of the plants you lust after before you start buying and planting.

"Research the needs of those ten plants you want before you buy them—then you may buy only three or four," says Paula Squitiere, who earned two Certificates of Merit in Ornamental Horticulture from Longwood Gardens, as she became more seriously interested in gardening at her home in Chester County, PA.

"But don't be afraid to experiment," adds Gail Seeley, who gardens in Berks County, PA. "Sometimes, plants that aren't supposed to do well in a certain place, will do so."

At 71, Judy Bauer still does a lot of reading about plants and their

needs, though she has been gardening since she was "barely out of diapers," and her garden-loving mother gave her a starter strip on the north side of their house. She has loved gardening ever since, and, as an award-winning painter, brings an artist's eye to her garden's design.

When she and her anthropologist husband Dan acquired the gristmill a couple of decades ago, weeds grew five feet tall on the gently sloping grounds, which had been leased to a pumpkin farmer. It took a lot of persistent mowing before Judy was able to start carving out flower beds.

Initially, with the help of a small greenhouse, she raised all her annuals and perennials from seed, but gave that up when she discovered Point Phillip Perennials, the Northampton County nursery owned by Kay Johns (former HPS president) and her husband Herb. That quickly became her favorite place to get most of her plants.

Today, very little of the property is not a garden. There's a formal garden—a stone patio enclosed by arborvitae; a rose garden with a summer house; a woodland garden filled with trillium, ferns, jack-in-the-pulpit, hellebores, hosta, and tiny violets; a contemplation garden with



Vista of a Bauer party garden area.

photo © Dan Bauer



Curved borders grace the Bauer garden.

photo © Dan Bauer

many viburnum; a large bird-feeding station; a party area with a tent in summer, and a backyard filled with perennials. There's also a vegetable garden, because Judy and Dan do a lot of entertaining.

"It's a garden that developed over time, with no straight lines," says Judy, who wielded a small chainsaw to get rid of undesirable trees before planting European hornbeams, Japanese maples, dogwoods, evergreens, and flowering shrubs. "Paths meander up, turn, and give you a whole different view from the one you had before. There are lots of paths with benches all along the way, because when Mom [the late Lillian Anderson] was living with us, she liked to walk, so I made paths all around the garden so she could sit and have a break."

The property has been featured on HGTV, written about in newspapers, and featured on garden tours, but it is always evolving. Currently, Judy is installing a tree peony walk along a path in the upper garden, and she and Dan are acquiring the 38-acre quarry property next door, with its four-acre lake complete with fish, ducks, geese, and herons that live there year-round. She plans to rip out everything and replant it so that it is low-maintenance. In fact, she is on a quest to make the entire garden easier to manage.

"We plan to live here until they take us out in pine boxes," she says, "so I'm trying to make it so I can still manage it when I'm old."



photo © Dan Bauer

From their back door, Dan & Judy look out over a colorful array of perennials and a vine-bedecked out-building.



WHEN GAIL SEELEY JOINED FORCES WITH HER SON CRAIG AND HIS FAMILY about 15 years ago to buy the 18th-century Fox Hollow Farm in Bern Township, PA, she told them, "You live in the house and I'll live in the garden."

She wasn't serious, of course—she lives separately in an addition—but she wasn't entirely joking, either. "You know I love it, because that's what I do—I'm in the garden, almost every day, from spring to fall," says the 76-year-old widow, whether at Fox Hollow or at her other home and garden in Brigantine, NJ, where she needs an irrigation system to combat the sandy



photo © Gail Seeley

The Seeley cottage garden in June.

soil. She uses a stool to weed now, a concession to osteoarthritis and having had both knees and both hips replaced. She figures she has been "seriously gardening" for about 50 years, since she and her husband installed flower beds at their first house, but she started gardening as a child, helping her father grow flowers and vegetables.

About four of the farm's nineteen acres are given over to park-like lawns and gardens that include a large farm pond fed by a little stream, and a small pond on the site of a former spring-house. Now graced with a fountain, that small pond and a gazebo—complete with swing—are at the center of a large island bed filled with shade plants such as witchhazel, redbud, and dogwood, as well as lobelia cardinalis, bloodroot, Virginia bluebells, Solomon's seal, turtlehead, and native ginger and columbine.

A variety of gardens break up the sweep of lawn, but her other major garden is a split-level, fenced cottage garden that gets a lot of sun: "I pack plants in there as closely as I can get them, so that from the middle of



photo © Gail Seeley

An overhead view of the Seeley cottage garden.

summer on I don't have to weed." Rhododendrons, crape myrtles, spireas, and tree peonies share space with perennials such as monarda, echinacea, yarrow, salvias, veronicas, yellow loosestrife, lavender, penstemon, asters, and roses. Clematis scramble along the fence, and larkspur self-seeds throughout the gardens, tying them all together with color echoes.

"It's really a summer garden," says Gail, who is primarily interested



photo © Gail Seeley

Path to the deck, flanked by smaller, mostly shady gardens.

Garden Adventures

On Sunday, March 17, the HPS Winter Interest SIG will tour **Paula Squitiere's** West Bradford garden in Chester County, PA. The tour begins at 1:00 P.M. See details at www.hardyplant.org/calendar/march.htm.

On Tuesday, June 11, the Pennsylvania Heartland Herb Society, in which Gail Seeley is active, will hold its **Herbal Delights Garden Bus Tour** of private gardens, specialized nurseries, and an orchard; and on Tuesday, October 8, the society will host **Herbal Delights Autumn Holiday Luncheon**, including herbal education, cooking, and crafting, at Stokesay Castle in Reading, PA. For more information, visit <http://phhsa.homestead.com>.



photo ©Linda Lam

The large island bed, with gazebo and fountain, beckons at the Seeleys.

in herbs and perennials. “I have plants that bloom in spring, but my peak is the end of June, into July.” She spent several years on the national board of the Herb Society of America, first as membership delegate for Atlantic County and then as financial development chair, and is now on the board of the Pennsylvania Heartland Herb Society as well as being involved with the Berks County Horticultural Club.



photo © Gail Seeley

Herb Society visitors, on a Seeley garden tour, relax beside a sidewalk bed, sprinkled with self-seeding larkspur in pink, white, and blue.

A semicircle of three raised beds close to the house grow culinary herbs, fragrant herbs, and plants for drying, but Gail has herbs scattered through all the gardens.



photo ©Gail Seeley

A staddle stone creates a focal point in the gazebo island bed at the Seeleys.

“A lot of perennials are herbs, which people often don’t realize—in fact, any plant that is useful in some way is an herb,” she says. “I love to cook, and I try to use herbs in everything.”



GARDENING HAS NO OFF SEASON FOR PAULA SQUITIERE.

“It’s inspiring to me to have something to look at from the windows all through the year, not just in the summer,” she says, so her one-acre garden in West Bradford is stuffed with winter and early-spring bloomers such as hellebores, snowdrops, and other bulbs along with winter-flowering shrubs like



photo ©Gail Seeley

A large cedar sits on the bank of the large pond at the Seeleys, with maples on the opposite bank and a spruce grove to the right.

stachyurus, corylopsis, and zone-nudging edgeworthia. But among the numerous woody plants in the garden are also many trees and shrubs that provide vibrant foliage color in the fall.

“I like to know that the fall color in my yard makes it like a whole new ‘spring’ to me. It’s so exciting,” says Paula, whose garden is on HPS’s



photo ©Paula Squitiere

Stachyurus praecox ‘Issai’ in the Squitiere garden.

Winter Interest SIG tour on March 17. “And I’m very much into fragrance. I don’t like artificial fragrance, like perfume, but when I smell magnolia in bloom, it’s the best thing.”

Paula describes her garden as “basically a square acre,” with borders around the perimeter and grassy pathways setting off island beds. The only tree left from when the family moved to the property in 1977 is a huge Kwanzan cherry, but Paula has added such woodies as red maple, yellowwood, Carolina silverbell, seven sons tree, magnolias, Japanese snowbell, serviceberries, yellow twig dogwood, and, in an L-shape along two sides of the yard, a privacy fence of hemlocks sheared to about twelve feet in height and regularly treated against woolly adelgid.

“They are so dense that they provide a lot of habitat for the birds,” says Paula, whose yard is a Certified Wildlife Habitat. She provides water and food year-round for birds, which she enjoys watching from indoors—last year, a family of bluebirds took up residence in a new bird house.

A more adventurous gardener now at 58 than when she began studying ornamental horticulture at Longwood

Gardens almost a decade ago, Paula is currently building collections of two of her favorite plants—snowdrops and clematis.

“I started with the three basic snowdrops,” *Galanthus nivalis*; its double form, *Galanthus nivalis* f. *pleniflorus* ‘Flore Pleno’; and *Galanthus elwesii*, she says, but is gradually

adding two or three of the more unusual kinds each year, buying them “in the green”—with foliage still attached—because snowdrops don’t like to be out of the ground. “These things hybridize easily with each other,” sometimes producing interesting new forms. “It’s a neat adventure. Collectors want that rare one with the different markings, and it’s getting a bit like Tulipomania.”



photo ©Paula Squitiere

Naturalized narcissus & *Cornus* 'Silver & Gold'

Of about 100 clematis vines she planted, 83 have survived, although they are still in the “creep stage,” she says. She embraces all clematis from large-flowered hybrids to natives, “which don’t have a problem with wilt, and hummingbirds love them,” but claims no favorites, although *Clematis* ‘Dr. Ruppel’ is her best bloomer currently. Why collect them?

“Because you can decorate a shrub from midsummer through fall

with one, and make the shrub look as though it’s having a second bloom. And it’s fun to combine colors—a pink clematis with a blue hydrangea, for example.”

She is outside with her plants almost every day, and there are always chores to do. “I like it all,” she says. “I’d much rather be out there doing anything, than be inside doing the cleaning.”



photo ©Paula Squitiere

Corylopsis spicata & *Rhododendron mucronulatum* 'Double Pink'



photo ©Paula Squitiere

Edgeworthia chrysantha 'Snow Cream', blooming in the Squitiere garden.

Denise Cowie, originally from Australia, worked 24 years as a journalist with the Philadelphia Inquirer, including a long stint as the paper’s gardening columnist. She is now a freelance writer and editor. As a gardener, she is more enthusiastic than expert, but still enjoys the plants and the critters in her two Pennsylvania gardens.

Ed Note: Clematis art drawings by Jim Bobb. For a full-color version of this article, go to the HPS/MAG web site, www.hardyplant.org.