

HOME & GARDEN



At left, a quiet goldfish pond in Bernice and William Foster's garden; at right, Mrs. Foster works in the garden at her Zoar 1

2-man business designs

By LYNN STOWE TOMB
Recorder Correspondent

HEATH — Using a variety of designs and gardening methods, from raised beds surrounded by stone to Japanese-influenced goldfish ponds, two young men from western Franklin County have started a business designing "Gardens for Living." The gardens of Barton Rouse and Andy Smith are an outdoor extension of living space. Each varies according to the needs and desires of the owners, but "the prettier your garden, the more time you'll spend in it, to make it grow well," said Rouse.

This is the third summer that Rouse has been gardening as a business and his first full summer with Smith. Four years ago at his home in Hoosic Tunnel, he started the project that now encompasses his entire side yard. The garden is an enclosed space of winding paths around deep raised beds banked with stonework and wooden beams. "I experiment on my own garden first," said Rouse, "and use the successful ideas in clients' gardens."

Rouse finds the raised beds to have a number of advantages besides beauty. A variation of French intensive gardening, the beds are banked up and double dug to about 2 feet. Compost and manure are added to the top, and the nutrients filter down. Because the roots can grow straight down, plants can be grown close together, saving space. "You never step on the growing bed, so the soil stays very loose," said Rouse. "Good drainage is the result."

"Weeding is never a problem," he continued. "You don't have to kneel or

stoop as much; the rock borders invite you to sit and dig."

Rouse has combined a large variety of plants in his garden and encourages his clients to mix vegetables, herbs and perennial flowers. "I always use spinach and colored lettuce and cabbage plants as low borders," he said. "Many vegetables are as beautiful as they are delicious."

Starting as an odd jobber, Rouse graduated to designing gardens by word of mouth. He was joined last fall by Smith when they started some major projects in Heath. Smith has a degree in horticulture from the University of Massachusetts and working experience with landscaping and trees and shrubs. He has been the manager of a commercial greenhouse in Concord, N.H., head of Brochu Nurseries, the largest nursery in New Hampshire, and grounds foreman for New Hampshire Technical Institute.

When Bernice Foster of Heath saw Rouse's garden she ordered one "just like it" for the front of her 1796 house. Rouse and Smith designed the layout and built the beds last fall, and Mrs. Foster planted this spring. The finished product is unique. "You have to be flexible, working with what you find in an area," said Rouse. "The contour of the land, the type of soil, and rocks or ledge should all be incorporated."

One thing they surfaced was a giant boulder, which became the main attraction in a "Japanese" corner of the garden. They exposed a large portion of the rock and built a small goldfish pool



Barton Rouse, of "Gardens for Living," works on John and Shir

Rooside it. Rocky steps climb up and then down, away from the pool, forming an ar water

Heaths, heathers enhance his garden

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

It was over 45 years ago that Ed Calver first came to Heath to visit friends, and it did not take long before he decided to make this little town his summer home. In the early '30's, he bought a piece of property on a wooded hillside complete with a small barn that the owners were turning into a summer cottage. They had gotten as far as gutting the interior, installing new windows and laying two straight paths that crossed the lawn and led nowhere.

Dr. Calver thought the windows were fine, and he continued the work on the house, but the first thing he did outside was eliminate those straight pathways.

In the intervening years, and especially since 1972 when he retired from teaching English at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and moved to Heath full time, he has spent time planning, planting, arranging and rearranging the gardens around the house. When I use the word "gardens" I do not mean to suggest a series of regular and formal flower borders. His gardens flow around the house and the old stone walls. He makes great use of native plants like swamp azalea, wild roses, mountain holly and others to create the effect of nature barely disturbed, the beauty only heightened and amplified. This year he has even decreased the amount of mowing around the house so that the tiny meadow, scattered with wildflowers early in the season, has become an additional transition area between the yard and the woods.

One of the first things I looked for were the heaths and heathers. Living in Heath, Dr. Calver has understandably become interested in these plants. He has planted them naturalistically in small clumps on a hillside, fading into the wild ferns. The Scotch heather was in bloom, and the low, shrubby evergreens were covered with pink blossoms. The heaths were green, but Dr. Calver showed me that they were already setting buds in order to bloom very early next spring.

In our area, heaths and heathers should only be planted in the spring, and the soil should be carefully prepared with plenty of peat moss or leaf mold. Most of them are lime haters, but given an acid soil, well-drained and in full sun, they will thrive. It is possible, by a judicious selection of variety, to maintain bloom from early spring until October. Since the heathers dry well they will also brighten autumnal and winter arrangements.

Oddly enough, Dr. Calver explained, blueberry, trailing arbutus or mayflower, mountain laurel, mountain cranberry and azaleas all belong to the same family as the heathers.

Next I was steered to a bed outside the living room windows that was raised and terraced into the side of a steeply climbing hill. "When I started this garden," Dr. Calver said, "it was going to contain only native plants, but I gave up that idea because there wasn't enough variety among low-growing, native plants." So now the garden contains things as exotic as the succulent that I was solemnly assured "originated on the rooftops of Japanese houses," as well as the natives: beech fern, steepbush, wild iris, and Jack-in-the-pulpit. One gracefully cascading juniper came from Bar Harbor in Maine. "I grew that from a cutting I snipped off

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while climbing Cadillac mountain."

The bed is also the home of a number of small alpine plants. There was a tiny variety of goldenrod that only reaches a height of 6 or 8 inches, no taller than the dwarf hemlock and scotch pine. The bed is so deep — almost square — that I questioned how it was possible to do any replanting or weeding. Dr. Calver pointed to the inconspicuous narrow stone walkways. These paths make it easy to work in the garden, and they also help these particular plants by keeping their roots cool.

At the edge of this garden was a bergamot (bee balm) in a very unusual color. He said it was a hybrid created when a burgundy bee balm that he had planted crossed with the lavender wild variety. There probably is no other like it anywhere.

He also identified European wild ginger for me. I had seen this low plant, with its heavy heartshaped leaves, deeply shining as though they were wet water lily pads, at the Berkshire Garden Center but could not find its name. Later he showed me the American wild ginger growing by a stone wall. The leaves were larger and not as shiny or heavy, but the roots were gingery tasting, and we speculated that they might indeed have been used in earlier days as a spice in making preserves.

Just beyond the house and further up the hill was an early white aster in full bloom as well as Joe Pye weed growing near one of the outbuildings. "Things that look like roadside weeds can be very effective in the right place."

As we walked around the house, Dr. Calver explained that all the level ground had been created. When I admired a large lichen-covered boulder that reminded me of a Japanese garden, he said that only its tip, maybe a foot square, had been visible when he started to dig.

Beyond the rock a narrow path led into the woods, lined with a large clump of cimicifuga, black snake root. Dr. Calver likes to see these tall spiky flowers from his window.

"They look kind of like skyrockets."

Of course, man must eat, and Dr. Calver does have a small vegetable garden located below a steep bank. It was looking very productive in spite of the difficult start in June. I was especially fascinated by a Japanese bean with pods that grow two feet long. The seed came from Stokes.

A final turn around the yard revealed a sundial. Most sundials that people purchase are more decorative than practical, but his desire for precision led him to lay out and build his own sundial that keeps accurate solar time. His quest for perfection is lightened by humor — the sundial, attached to a flat rock on the ground, is surrounded by a low planting that includes creeping thyme.

Gardens take many forms, and the effect that Dr. Calver has achieved, of a house gently set against a hospitable hillside amidst a providentially beautiful collection of plants, belies the care, taste and judgment that goes into creating an effortlessly natural garden.