

# To Farm and Preserve

A visit with gardeners Mark Huffaker and Rodger Metheny

**M**ac bounds to my car to greet me. The vigilant Chesapeake Bay retriever is letting everyone know I've arrived. I'm here to visit Mark Huffaker and Rodger Metheny, along with Mac and an abundance of wildlife. Together, they call this Northwest Portland mini farm home, and I immediately feel at home myself.

Just off Northwest Skyline Boulevard, their property, just under an acre, backs up to Forest Park. During the 12 years they've lived here, they've built an abundant edible garden. Consummate preservers, they preserve everything they grow, supplemented with plenty of produce from area farms. We head to the back deck, and Mac takes a rest under the weeping pussy willow while I take in the backyard wildlife.

Wildlife in Portland? You bet. And Rodger and Mark have their eyes on them. Over the years they've seen deer, bobcats, elk, raccoons, coyotes, night flying

squirrels, skunks and even a lynx. OK, the lynx was someone's pet, but it still counts.

But I've come to see their edible garden, and Mac wakes up from his nap and leads us out to the apple trees, heavily laden with apples this time of year. Two old apple trees sit side by side, a Gravenstein and a Granny Smith. Gravensteins are known to produce apples perfect for pies and are quite popular with the deer, too. Rodger points out when the deer come through, they'll often take just one bite out of each apple they can reach, moving on to sample the next one. Mac likes them, too, and carefully guards several Gravensteins that Mark has picked for me and set aside.

On this stretch of Skyline, the few houses are filled with a tightly knit community, and Mark and Rodger speak kindly of their neighbors. It's the kind of neighborhood where neighbors share tools and equipment and help each other out when needed. I glance over

at Mac and realize my apples he was guarding have mysteriously disappeared. He might even be licking his lips.

The vegetable garden Rodger and Mark tend is surrounded by a removable wire fence, and when we approach, Mark pulls it back so we can enter. Here, Mark and Rodger grow vegetables and herbs that produce like crazy. Their crops include lettuce, rhubarb, peppers, delicata squash, tomatillos and rows of tomatoes. And the pumpkin? It's a Long Island pumpkin, and according to Rodger, "Boy, does it grow big!" It also is said to produce the very best homemade pumpkin pie.

It's late in the season and I admire the abundance of ripe tomatoes. They're Stupitz, and Mark swears by this Russian variety. "With our cool night temperatures I don't know why more people don't grow this tomato."

And then there are the peppers. Lots and lots of peppers, including wax and jalapeños. But the crinkly yellow pepper is Rodger's pride and glory. It's the Bhut Jolokia pepper, named the hottest pepper by the Chile Pepper Institute in New Mexico. I'm afraid to even touch it. One touch of a spicy Thai pepper and removing my contact lenses hours later was a moment I'll never, ever forget.

Their love of cooking is fed with the herbs from the garden, including lovage, basil, fennel, chives, cilantro, oregano, rosemary, bay leaf and thyme. I nibble on a fennel seed and take in this perfect spot. It's not fancy, but it produces, and all of it is fed organically. Feeding the soil is their



Rodger Metheny (left) and Mark Huffaker's hard work pays off with an abundant harvest.



secret, and every fall they mound the fallen leaves from nearby trees onto the beds. Come spring, they mulch with well-composted manure, picked up from the equestrian center just down the road. Rodger empties his sandbags, stored in the back of his pickup during the winter to help driving on icy roads, and this mix of manure, sand and composted leaves provides just the right mix to feed the soil.

Mac hunts moles in the nearby field while Rodger and Mark show me what they've preserved this summer. Jams, sauces and salsa fill the shelves in their garage, some set aside as gifts for the holidays. I head out with a jar of "black and blue" jam, what I soon will discover is a delicious blend of blueberries and blackberries. Mac returns from mole hunting, Mark heads out to pick the last of the tomatoes, and Rodger waves as my tires crunch on the gravel drive, reluctantly leaving this lovely place. **jo**

LEANN LOCHER is an avid North Portland gardener and can be reached at [sassygardener@gmail.com](mailto:sassygardener@gmail.com). Her Web site is [www.sassygardener.com](http://www.sassygardener.com).

## OLD PORTLAND

HARDWARE & ARCHITECTURAL

Antique Lighting, Hardware and Architectural Finds



PIECES OF HISTORY FOR YOUR HOME

503 234-7380

4035 SE DIVISION STREET • 10AM TO 6PM • TUESDAY THRU SUNDAY  
— [oldportlandhardware.com](http://oldportlandhardware.com) —

## EVERYBODY'S GARDEN CENTER Hydroponics Grow Lights Garden Tools

2701 SE 14th Ave. Portland  
503-231-1582  
[Hydroponicsgarden.com](http://Hydroponicsgarden.com)



JEWEL A. ROBINSON, ABR  
REAL ESTATE BROKER  
B'zillion Dollar Producer

Prudential NW Properties Cell 503.708.9508  
4224 NE Halsey • #340 Fax 503.520.2422  
Portland OR 97213 [jewelrocks@gmail.com](mailto:jewelrocks@gmail.com)

View all Portland area listings at  
[www.jewelarobinson.com](http://www.jewelarobinson.com)



## COLLECTIBLES INCLUDING:

- Patricia Breen Ornaments
- Nutcrackers
- Plush animals
- ...and much more!



118 NW 23RD AVENUE

(503) 223-4048