

JUNE'S GARDEN

Village of Flowers (continued)

Linda Medley and Mary Jo El-Wattar are becoming known as the "Sweet Pea and Rose Ladies," for their success in growing sweet peas that completely cover a fence which surrounds their garden of roses only one hundred feet from the ocean front.

Over the last three years they replaced a small front lawn with a path that divides two planting areas. The roses they grow are: Voodoo (peach), Carefree and Sexy Remy (both pink), Angel Face (lavender), a yellow rose they renamed Happening as it had lost its original tag and it surprised them by producing an abundance of large sweet-scented flowers; several miniatures (various colors), and a climbing rose Dortmund (single bright pink) that they have trellised on the east side of their house. Planted with the roses are many different perennials and annuals, all chosen for color and added texture to complement the roses. Sweet alyssum, moss and sedum fill in the spaces between the rocks that form the path. Last summer one of their favorite annuals was Nigella damascena. This flower has feathery light green branches of fine threadlike leaves that form a collar around bright blue flowers. It's commonly known as Love-in-a-Mist. Nigella seeds can be sown directly into the soil. The fence covered with sweet peas surrounds this garden.

Medley's son, who lives in Washington, provides them with rose fertilizer which he buys from the Puyallup (WA) Rose Society. After danger of frost around the end of February when they prune the roses, they apply this fertilizer and repeat the application after the first bloom. The second application helps develop second blossoms. During the summer they also water the plants with a liquid fish fertilizer. They stop feeding the plants in the late summer, so as not to encourage soft growth that could be damaged by fall storms or first frosts. In the fall they stake and tie down the tallest plants, only slightly pruning any overly long shoots against the chance that winter winds would whip the branches which could cause the plant to be uprooted. In February they prune out damaged deadwood, congested or spindly growth to form a strong balanced framework. The branches left are pruned to about 12 inches, cutting each branch back to an outward-facing bud. The climbing Dortmund is not pruned as severely. Annual pruning out of deadwood, training it by providing supports and tying loose shoots is required, and the same formula of fertilizer and care they give to the other roses.

Enriched soil, adding some peat moss, compost, proper fertilizing and watering especially during dry spells, diligently discarding any suspected leaf problems, washing off with soapy water any aphids that appear, dead heading spent flowers and pruning are Medley and El-Wattar's formula for growing healthy roses. They avoid using pesticides or herbicides.

Their success in growing sweet peas is in providing enriched soil, and applying slow-release fertilizer to the ground during planting. When the first growth appears, they water in liquid fish fertilizer, repeating every two weeks during the summer. Each fall they add lime to leach into the soil during the winter rains. Lime sweetens the soil. Planting time varies as heavy continuous spring rains may cause the seeds to rot if planted too early. This year they waited until April to plant. The first blooms appeared about the middle of July and continued into October. To completely cover their fence, which is 20 feet across the front and 40 feet to the side, they used one large package of mixed colors for the first planting. After these seeds sprout, they fill in with tree or four smaller packets chosen for various solid colors.

Avid gardeners like Medley and El-Wattar soon run out of space to plant all the many available combinations of flowers they want to plant, whether they are old favorites or new varieties. They have added window boxes, dug and enriched the soil, making narrow one-foot beds on all four sides of their house, and have filled the front porch with potted plants.

This summer El-Wattar bought a Bougainvillea to remind her of a garden she had in her hometown in Orange County, CA. This plant and other tender plants such as geranium and fuchsia will be stored in a protected place over the winter to be saved for next year's garden.

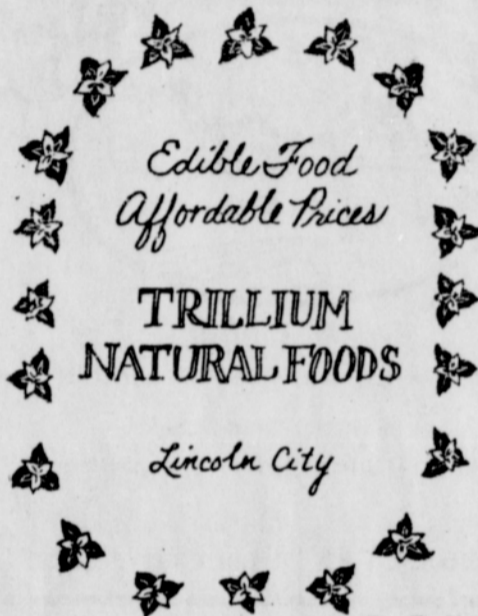
Both ladies have gardened since they were children. Medley was raised in Washington. Gardening for them is a year-long venture. Through the winter they start planning what flowers they might add by studying and learning through gardening literature, visiting nurseries, and asking advice of other gardeners. "Buy it and try it" is their motto. Their enthusiasm and perseverance seem to have paid off since they have grown many flowers others have advised against growing so close to the ocean front.

They enjoy walking on the beach and collecting interesting pieces of driftwood. They have used some of these larger pieces to border the garden they built across the street from their home which is located on property they manage for the Casey family, called "Haystack Hideaway." In this garden they planted Fennel, Gazania, Rudbeckia, Gloriosa-Dasey, Coreopsis, Chocolate Cosmos, Gallardia, and an artichoke plant. By the second year the artichoke plant produced 16 edible chokes by early summer.

In June they cut the plant clear to the ground and fed it with liquid fish-fertilizer every two weeks. By early September, the plant had grown large enough to produce eight more edible chokes. In October they cut the plant back again for protection against strong winter winds in hope that the plant will thrive and produce again next year.

Their garden was chosen for tours during the past two summers as part of gardening classes held through the Portland State University's Haystack Summer Program for the Arts. One of the classes was taught by Beth Holland of Holland's Nursery. The other was taught by Lucy Hardyman, President of Portland's Hardy Plant Society, and Ann Lovejoy, lecturer and author of many gardening books. Medley and El-Wattar's garden was in full bloom in July when the classes were held, and was a learning experience, especially for the students who have coastal gardens, as to what can grow so close to the ocean's edge.

Besides managing the Casey's property and tending to their garden, El-Wattar is employed at the Ecola Square Book Store. Medley was recently hired by Mike Johnson, who owns Johnson's Landscape Maintenance business, to help plant and maintain flower beds under Johnson's service contracts.



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