

# Successful Flower Gardens

By COLLEEN DENISON and LINDA WENTLAND  
*Dellwood Hill Golf Club*      *White Bear Yacht Club*

In order to achieve successful flower gardens it is essential to have an inspiring design and follow a routine maintenance schedule.

**Colleen Denison has been Lead Landscape gardener at Dellwood Hills Golf Club since 1992.** She designs and maintains 30 annual and/or annual/perennial combination gardens, 20 container gardens and hanging baskets. She has an annual budget of \$900 for mulch and potting soil, and approximately \$7,000 for annuals and perennial plant material. She supervises two assistants, full time, during the season.

At Dellwood Hills, the architecture of the clubhouse is Prairie-style, so she designs using an informal style and tries to incorporate a variety of native gardens plants. A majority of the landscapes surrounding the clubhouse were designed over 30 years ago, so Colleen has been updating, as budget will allow, over the years. This has been challenging as well as rewarding.

**Linda Wentland has been Lead Landscape Gardener at White Bear Yacht Club for 17 seasons.** She designs and maintains 15 annual and/or annual perennial combination gardens, a culinary herb garden, 115 containers, window boxes and hanging baskets. She has an annual budget of \$2,000 for mulch, compost and potting soil, and \$11,000 for annual and perennial plant material. Major landscape projects are budgeted separately, as approved by the Board. She supervises one part-time watering assistant and utilizes crew members for other gardening tasks.

**White Bear Yacht Club is a seasonal club;** the main clubhouse is opened from May through September. The Golf House and golf course remain open into late Fall. White Bear Yacht Club has recently built a new clubhouse, as well as, a new Golf house, so many of the landscapes were updated along with the new buildings. In addition to gardening, Linda creates cut flower arrangements for the clubhouse and the Golf House, and has a budget of \$7,500 for cut flowers. The flower arrangements are supplemented, when possible, with outside plant material from the gardens and landscapes. The gardens



*Flowers greet members, guests and staff as you enter Dellwood Hills Golf Club.*

are designed cottage style, with an emphasis on summer blooming plant material that may also be used in cut flower arrangements. WBYC is a Certified Audubon Sanctuary, therefore plant materials that attract and are advantageous to the birds and butterflies are frequently used in the gardens and landscapes.

**Both gardeners feel that the next year's gardening season begins in the Fall.** At the end of each season, we assess the gardens and containers. We take a close look at the plant materials used that season. We take time to document, through pictures and notes, our garden success, as well as failures for that season. Several variables can alter the success of the gardens, such as weather conditions, available labor, new products or plants used, or change of maintenance schedule, so it is best to take detailed notes. We try to prepare as much as possible for next season in the Fall, since we never know what Spring will bring.

Fall is an important time to thoroughly clean all flower beds and landscapes.

Disease and pests harbor in plant debris, so it is best to remove as much debris as possible. We remove all annual flowers, and cut down perennials and ornamental grasses. In recent years a growing trend has emerged leaving some perennials and ornamental grass blooms intact over the winter. This not only adds winter interest to the gardens, but provides a source of food and cover for wildlife. Fall is a wonderful time to divide and move around perennial plant material, as well as install new perennial gardens. Many suppliers offer reduced prices on plant material in the Fall. It is also time to plant Spring blooming bulbs.

**At Dellwood Hills, all landscape mulch in the annual/perennial combination beds is removed in the Fall.**

Dellwood Hills uses a hardwood mulch which is reapplied in Spring after planting. White Bear Yacht Club uses pine bark mulch in their annual/perennial beds,

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reapplying only to necessary areas each Spring.

After the ground freezes, tender perennials are covered with a winter protective mulch. Available sources from the golf courses are most often used such as pine boughs. Both gardeners limit the use of tender perennials that require winter protection and extra attention. One exception would be Hydrangea "Endless Summer," which both gardeners have planted and have found they need extra winter protection. At Dellwood Hills, they have extensive rose landscapes, but have replaced tender varieties with hardy, own-root roses, such as Carefree Wonder.

### THE DESIGN PROCESS

Late Fall we begin designing the next season's gardens. Since both gardeners have worked several seasons at the same Club, the challenge is to find new and exciting designs. Over the years many new plants have flooded the market and new trends have emerged, so we stay on top of what is happening in the industry. We gather ideas and inspirations from a variety of sources, such as trade magazines, decorating and gardening books, seed catalogues and colleagues gardens and incorporate our own style and what is suitable for our Clubs.

We have both found that the Minnesota Green Expo is an exceptional source for education and networking. We attend several seminars, which provide information on a variety of subjects of interest to landscape gardeners, by professionals working in the field. We visit the Trade Show to meet with our established growers and suppliers, see actual sample plant materials, buy supplies and establish new relationships. We acquire all the new catalogues and begin to gear up for the next gardening season.

The design process for Colleen at Dellwood Hills begins with establishing a color theme. After a color theme is decided, she will look for suitable plant material.

The design process for Linda at WBYC begins with an inspiration from a new plant or foliage, finding colors that complement that plant and developing a final color theme. Once a color theme has been established for the season, the gardens and containers will be designed accordingly. This year at Dellwood Hills, Colleen acquired red cannas lilies, so red will be the prominent color for all of Dellwood Hills gardens and containers. Linda, at White Bear Yacht Club was inspired by the bronze coloring of Carex "Toffee Twist"™ and established a color theme of purple, bronze, coral and pinks for the White Bear Yacht Club. Once a color theme is established, both gardeners will then look for suitable and available plant material. Since there is a tremendous amount of plant materials and colors available, establishing a color theme helps to narrow down the choices and unify all landscapes. It is easy to get carried away by all the choices



Volleyball Gardens Guys and Dolls

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and end up with a hodgepodge.

Most gardeners like to use new plant materials, but until a plant has been proven successful, both gardeners suggest using it cautiously and in remote areas. We have both experienced unsatisfactory performance from some new plant introductions. For example, neither gardener found the Kong Coleus to meet their expectation; although the coloration is fantastic, it did not perform well. On the other hand, the Dragon Wing begonia and Wave petunias, are to both gardeners indispensable. We both continue to use and depend on proven performers, such as Elfin impatiens; although they have been on the market for years they remain a constant in our designs.

We recommend starting each season with a journal, which includes a diagram of each garden to be planted, listing square footage, sunlight, soil and watering conditions. We list the plants we have selected and the exact number allotted for each garden and container. We may even include a color sketch. This journal will be used throughout the gardening season

and any observations will be documented. Keeping an organized and detailed record of all designs and the plants selected will make ordering and planting easier. We add up the total number of plants needed and round up to the nearest full flat. We round to account for some plant fatality. We keep a backup plan in mind in case we need to substitute a certain flower due to crop failure or weather conditions. Orders are usually completed and received by the grower by mid-winter.

The members at Dellwood Hills and the WBYC insist on a fuller, finished annual garden as soon as possible, so we rarely follow recommended plant spacing. We will plant our annuals closer together than recommended. The advantage to planting closer is a fuller garden with less weed competition, better water retention and the ability to withstand weather conditions better. A disadvantage to closer planting is increased disease and pest probability so we must monitor the gardens carefully. We feel the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

### SPRING

Spring starts with general cleaning and preparation of the annual flower beds. At

Dellwood Hills, Colleen uses a bagged mushroom compost every year to amend the annual flower beds. She prefers this compost because it is easily transported and applied to the gardens. It is thoroughly sifted; therefore it has little debris and is nutrient rich. It is more expensive than bulk compost, but feels it is worth the cost. At WBYC, Linda amends all annual flower gardens with compost yearly, also using bulk garden compost. Some of the compost is purchased and some is on site from last year's recycled garden waste.

After applying compost, both gardeners mix in a slow-release fertilizer. Dellwood uses a well balanced 15-15-15, whereas WBYC uses 14-24-14. The compost and fertilizer are worked into the soil. The larger areas are roto-tilled while the smaller areas are hand-tilled. The areas are then hand raked until smooth, watered and left alone until planting time. Both gardeners avoid compaction by staying out until planting time.

### PLANTING

Since container gardening has become

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a major trend, and at WYBC a main focus, it has become necessary to change out the plant material several times during the season. Both gardeners design Spring, Summer and Fall container plantings. Dellwood is open year round, so they also design winter holiday display containers. Not all containers are replanted, only those in key high traffic areas. New soil is added to all containers in the Spring prior to planting. Dellwood uses the mushroom compost mixed with Scotts Plus with Miracle Gro potting soil. WBYC uses Sunshine Mix #1.

Our annual plants start arriving the third week of May, weather permitting, and our goal is to plant them as soon as possible. Ideally, we like to have everything planted by the first week of June. While both gardeners would prefer to plant the gardens themselves, this is not realistic. We need to use available crew members to assist us in planting. We both have found it difficult to give up total control of planting some areas, but the reality is we have to. We both, however, continue to plant the containers without assistance. Plant material in flats requires tremendous attention, so it is necessary to get the plants in the ground and containers as soon as possible. This point in the gardening season is the most stressful, and it is a relief when the annual gardens are completed. We can then begin our routine maintenance schedule.

Maintenance of the annual and perennial gardens include watering, fertilizing, weeding and deadheading.

### WATERING

At Dellwood, the gardens are hand-watered, depending on weather conditions. In periods of prolonged dry spells, watering can take up a majority of the work day. At WBYC, the gardens are watered by automatic irrigation, usually overnight, with the exception of one small garden. With the recent completion of the Pro Shop and Golf House at White Bear Yacht Club, many additional Terra-Cotta pots and Window boxes were added, and we found it necessary to develop an efficient watering system. The answer was a 55-gallon tank mounted on a trailer that easily pulls behind an EZ-GO workhorse. The water is pumped out of the tank with a small pump, that runs off the EZ-GO battery. An assistant was hired part-time to exclusively water the tremendous amount of containers, window baskets

and hanging baskets. All containers are watered with the tank, with the exception of six hanging baskets at the Golf House that are watered with drip irrigation. Containers, window boxes and hanging baskets need to be monitored very closely, because they are easily over- or under-watered. In periods of hot weather or under windy conditions they often need to be watered twice a day. The Lead Gardener must train the assistants that are responsible for watering carefully and thoroughly. Many plants have perished due to improper watering.

### FERTILIZING

At Dellwood Hills, the containers and baskets are fertilized weekly with water soluble. Miracle Gro 10-10-10, or 10-50-10 if heavier blooming is preferred. Fertilome Rose food in a granular form is applied at the base of the roses when needed. The annual gardens are fertilized mid-summer using the water soluble Miracle Gro 10-10-10. At WBYC, the containers, window boxes and hanging baskets are fertilized weekly at the recommended rate with Lesco 16-32-16. The water soluble fertilizer is mixed into the 55-gallon watering tank. The gardens at the WBYC are fertilized every 7-10 days with 16-32-16 fertilizer, mixed into a spray tank, and applied onto the foliage. We prefer to use this higher phosphorus fertilizer to encourage blooming.

**At Dellwood, specific plants that are prone to fungal diseases**, such as roses, Black Eyed Susans and Garden Phlox receive routine applications of fungicide. Colleen rotates between Daconil, Safer Garden Fungicide and Fung-Onil multi-purpose fungicide. Colleen will begin spraying when any signs of disease appear. The roses are sprayed with Isotox routinely. Last season the shade gardens were heavily infested with slugs. The problem became catastrophic, so a slug bait was applied. These products have worked effectively in controlling disease problems.

**At WBYC we will spray the gardens with Daconil fungicide**, when the weather conditions are favorable for diseases, or if any signs of disease appear. We do not spray any pesticides, because they can



also harm beneficial insects such as honey bees and butterflies.

**Another important maintenance duty is, of course, weeding.** Neither Dellwood Hills or the WBYC gardeners use a pre-emergent herbicide, such as Preen, on any of their gardens. We find with routine and frequent weeding, we can keep the gardens under control. We both like to use small hand rakes to pull out the weeds, and “fluff” the soil. By hand raking, we eliminate the entire weed and its root, aerate the soil and give the garden a clean, finished look. It is labor intensive, but the results are worth the time.

**Another important gardening duty is deadheading.** Deadheading, which is removing the spent blooms from the plant, is very important. With regular deadheading, the annuals will bloom continuously, and the gardens will look neater. Some flowers, such as geraniums and snapdragons, need continual deadheading in order to perform successfully. Whereas others, such as impatiens, rarely need to be deadheaded. A gardener should choose plants that are suitable for the amount of labor they have available to maintain them.

It was challenging to write this article, because so much of our daily work has become intuitive. Furthermore, we did not want to repeat readily available information. So, we hope we have provided insight into this aspect of the golf course industry. We both are passionate in our love of gardening and the outdoors. Although we have differences in our methods and designs, we have learned from each other. We would be interested in sharing information with any interested colleagues, perhaps round-table discussions and/or tours of local golf courses.