

Outdoor rooms showcase Thornes design aesthetic

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Wanda Thorne said when she was in high school, she told friends she wanted to have a personal library, a flower garden and marry a man who could cook.

And she has managed to have all three.

As the head chef at the Thorne household, Mike Thorne loves the fresh vegetables and herbs that are incorporated into the landscape designed by Wanda. And while very involved in the loading, lifting and moving aspects of the garden, he doesn't consider gardening a personal passion.

"I do love the fresh vegetables and I like knowing there are no pesticides used on the fresh foods we eat," Mike Thorne said.

"He supports my gardening efforts," said Wanda Thorne. "I don't like to use pesticides and I don't prune a lot. Only when it starts to interfere with a pathway."

The backyard landscape is filled with pathways and a variety of "outdoor rooms" that provide interest and intrigue to this garden oasis.

The Thornes have worked hard to create a relaxing outdoor area, perfect for entertaining.

Their garden is now a wonderful space for friends and family, but it was a long time in the making.

Wanda Thorne is quick to say their wasn't a "master plan" to their garden design. She has loved gardening from a very early age, but serious attention to their gardening efforts did not get underway until their son, Dean, suggested a patio for the backyard. Two pine trees were removed and the patio installed.

They have one of the only gardens in the area to feature three outdoor buildings, which, much like the garden, has evolved over time.

New additions to their home and the removal of several trees have required major adjustments and additions to the landscaping.

"It has been a domino effect," Wanda Thorne said. "I am always moving stuff around to adjust to the changes in sun and shade. The garden is a living thing, and it changes."

Wanda Thorne's garden design flows from her love of interior decorating. The use of outdoor rooms provides guests an opportunity to experience Wanda's love of whimsy and color.

“There’s just no place to sit in her garden that there’s not something interesting to see,” said family friend Emily Jones. “She is one of the people that inspired me to ‘reach’ a bit, step outside the box and let your imagination run wild.” Next door neighbor, Milo Burnham, said the Thorne’s have a nice garden and they regularly share plants, particularly daylilies.

The Thorne’s said Burnham has been an excellent resource as they continue to learn more about plants and gardening in the Mississippi weather.

Wanda Thorne describes herself as an enthusiastic Spring gardener, but her interest wanes in the July and August Mississippi heat.

“I am a fool for flowering shrubs and plants,” Wanda Thorne said. “It is almost an addiction.”

She enjoys entertaining in the garden again in the fall, when the plants take on deeper color and the breeze is a little cooler.

The structure and ornamentation allows the garden to be beautiful all year long, even if there are a few months when working the garden can be too hot or too cold.

This year, one of Wanda’s favorite plants is the carpet rose. She loves roses, but has not always been successful with plantings. The Knockout roses have been a wonderful way for the Thornes to have roses without the pesticides. The carpet rose is new this year, allowing for a smaller plant with many of the qualities of the Knockout rose.

Favorite shady plants include ferns, hostas and hydrangeas.

Herbs are also interspersed throughout the landscape. Wanda said at one point, she had a formal herb garden, but decided she loves the more casual, informal look of a cottage garden.

“I love the meandering paths in the garden,” Wanda Thorne said. “I love that you don’t see everything at once. It is revealed to you as you are coming into the garden.”

She said she has always been inspired by the English cottage garden look. She loves the views of the garden from the various rooms of her home, so much of the design plays into how it is seen from the inside-out.

Beyond the design aspect of gardening, Wanda Thorne loves digging in the dirt.

She said when planting anything in Oktibbeha County clay soil, it is important to add amendments: compost, humus or manure and some peat moss. She will also add a little sand into the mix. Wanda recommends double-digging to help plants develop a deep base for their root system.

“I believe you are not a real gardener unless you get a little dirt under your nails,” Thorne said. “I wear gloves sometimes, but I love using my hands and digging in the dirt.”