Growing Your Own

by **Moya Andrews** | photography by **Jeffrey Hammond**

More locals—in town and out—
are cultivating home vegetable gardens.

The number of Americans who are producing their own fruits and vegetables is rivaling the number of patriotic citizens who created Victory Gardens during World War I, and Bloomington is no exception. The reasons for the current blossoming of home gardens include the benefits of fresh healthy food, interest in sustainable living, easy access to information about growing practices, and the economic recession. But whatever the reasons, tomatoes, beans, and squash are flourishing in backyards, on family plots, and even in front yards.

These modern gardeners are descendants of generations of growers for whom gardening was not a matter of choice. Before the Industrial Revolution, people were utterly dependent on their agricultural skills. The medicinal herbs, fruits, and vegetables produced in the kitchen garden were critical to survival. Crop failure meant starvation, even as recently as the mid-1800s when the Great Potato Famine in Ireland caused not only massive emigration but many deaths. The folklore of gardening was passed down across the centuries by word of mouth until the recent advent of chemical pesticides and fertilizers and the rise of modern advertising. Nowadays, organic gardeners are keenly aware that some of the more earth-friendly practices of the past are preferable to chemical solutions for pest and disease control.

Bloom visited four local vegetable gardeners with different approaches to cultivation. Two are in town, two in country settings on the outskirts of the city. Two sell a portion of their bounty while the others produce their vegetables for home consumption. While growing their own food may no longer be a necessity, all these gardeners have a passion for homegrown edibles.

Gloria Jacques' homegrown organic produce creates a still life.

Vegetable GARDEN # 1

Beauty, Utility, Frugality— All in a Front Yard!

Diane Jung & Michael Lindeau — South Childs Court

Jung and Lindeau's front garden is a haven for wildlife.

Colorful zinnias and other annual flowers blend with the cheerful color of the fence that encloses the vegetable patch.

Mulch protects the developing vegetables.

Jung and Lindeau enjoy harvesting cherry tomatoes each day during the growing season.

Michael Lindeau and Diane Jung.

An enclosed 16-by-24-foot vegetable plot is nestled in the corner of a suburban front garden, located there because it is the only part of the lot that gets full sun. Designed by Diane Jung and built by Michael Lindeau four years ago, it is both a productive plot and an attractive space. Ornamental grasses form a partial screen from the street and rustle in the breeze as neighbors observe this monument to recycling. "Children and their parents walk by and they can see from the adjacent sidewalk that food can be grown in a front garden, and that what we eat does not need to be hidden away," says Jung.

Morning glories bloom on the three strands of wire strung above a salvaged wooden fence to deter deer. At each corner of the fence are compost enclosures, along with hanging baskets of flowering plants. Lindeau, who is active in the sustainable-living movement, made paths through the garden using planks left over from the home's deck.

Prior to moving to Bloomington, Lindeau lived in the woods in the Ozarks for 12 years with no phone or electricity, just solar panels to power the golf cart batteries that ran his lights and his laptop. "Diane is interested in aesthetics," he says. "For me, functionality and frugality are the aesthetic." Even Skye, their 15-year-old Siberian husky, contributes to recycling as the fur he sheds is put outside for the birds to use in building their nests.

Many repurposed treasures and all of the garden plants are in the front of the house because the back of the property is a wooded ravine that descends to Rock Creek. These gardeners are finding creative uses for objects and plants others have discarded, and harmoniously melding them into a landscape that combines both edibles and ornamentals in a small space.

"The plants are mainly grown from seed indoors under lights," Jung explains, "and annuals are wintered over indoors, too. I enjoy colorful plants in containers around the perimeter of the edible garden." These include dragon wing begonias, zinnias, yarrow, black-eyed Susans, Joe-Pye weed, and coneflowers.

Jung, who mows her lawn with a push mower, is a past board member of Mother Hubbard's Cupboard and started Lawns for Life, an organization that discourages the use of chemical additives.

In the vegetable garden, Jung and Lindeau grow many different types of tomatoes, lettuce, kale, chard, beans, zucchini, and herbs like fennel and basil. "We let the cilantro and coriander go to seed and produce more plants," Jung says. "We have lots of rabbits; in fact, two lots were born underneath the garlic. We also enjoy the surprise plants that spring up in the compost each year and that we transplant into the garden beds."

Jung and Lindeau are firm believers in mulch and use thick layers of newspapers covered with wood chips or hay. "Our whole garden is organic and toxin free, and even our bamboo stakes are grown on our property," she says. "In our side garden we use bales of straw to plant melons, gourds, and potatoes, and we use the leaves from the locust tree to mulch the garden each fall. Nothing is wasted and we eat well."

Close-up of a cluster of pear-shaped tomatoes.

Melons ripening outside the enclosed vegetable patch.

Vegetable GARDEN # 2

David Waterman

East Homestead Drive, Hoosier Acres

Bark mulch is used on the paths dividing the raised garden at the Bar Rabbit Ranch.

The Bar Rabbit Ranch

A carrot almost asking to be harvested.

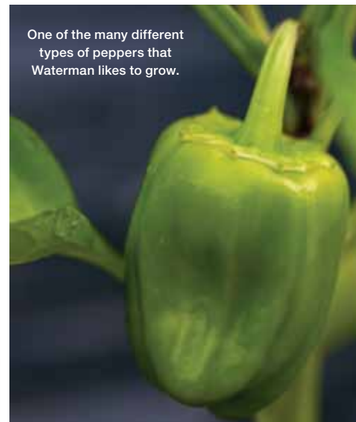
‘As the name of my garden suggests, these creatures [rabbits] pose a horticultural challenge.’

This small shed is where Waterman starts his small plants that are then transplanted into the garden in the foreground.

Snow pea.

Blossoms on the tomato vines.

Basil plants before they are put out into the elements.



One of the many different types of peppers that Waterman likes to grow.

David Waterman.

In his professional life, David Waterman is a professor of telecommunications, but for 25 years he also has been researching ways to improve his edible-gardening skills. He has read widely, visited farms, taken a master-gardener course, and worked as a volunteer at Stranger’s Hill Organics. Yet he remains curious about how plants work. “I can’t figure out just what makes a great crop,” he says. “But every year or so, it seems that among the failures are one or two incredibly prolific results.”

Waterman started his garden after his family moved to Bloomington in 1993. At first it was almost entirely located on his neighbor’s lot and Waterman kept his friend supplied with vegetables. “After he died and his house was sold in 2005, I moved the garden and about a hundred wheelbarrows full of dirt onto my land,” he says.

His five family members—two of whom are away at college most of the year—“are big veggie eaters,” Waterman says, “so I grow a variety of things for our meals, including potatoes, peas, asparagus, cabbages, squash, broccoli, tomatoes, and sometimes corn.” All are grown organically. His main indulgence, he says, “is peppers, as I grow a number of one-plant-at-a-time varieties just to see how they will turn out.” He usually sets out eight to ten tomato plants in the spring, then four or five more in late June to yield a steady supply during summer and early fall. About 12 or 15 paste tomato plants yield enough sauce for the entire year. And he gets a more or less steady supply of beans from a five-foot row of pole beans, first in late April, then again in June and July.

The Waterman home sits on about an acre of tranquil green space in an established neighborhood. The vegetable garden is behind the house in the far northeast corner of the lot where it gets good sun most of the year. “My wife Sharon is the family landscaper and in charge of the flowers,” Waterman says. “My dedicated and enclosed 2,900-square-foot section has raised beds on a rectangular grid, separated by paths of wood chips.” The vegetables grow inside a seven-foot-high deer-proof, double-mesh-netting fence.

There is an additional two feet of chicken wire around the base to keep out rabbits. “As the name of my garden suggests, these creatures pose a horticultural challenge.”

The main variable affecting the productivity of his plot, he says, is not the rabbits but the amount of time he can devote to the garden and still get his work done and spend time with family and friends. Recently Waterman spent a semester on sabbatical at the University of Oxford in England. His garden lay fallow in the spring, so his emphasis moved to fall crops. “In my experience, spinach, most greens, and cabbage-family vegetables, weather permitting, make good fall crops,” he says. “However, it has been hard for me to get the timing right in the past, and late crops seem a little less reliable than those planted in early spring.” But, he says, they are “just as tasty when they come out right.”

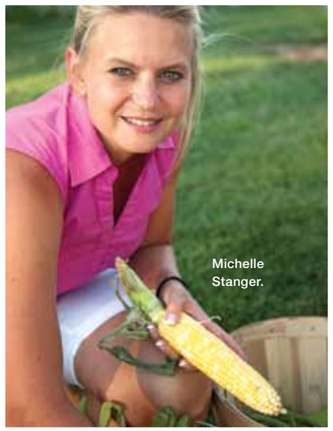
Vegetable GARDEN # 3

Stanger Family Farm / West Maple Grove Road

A Family Tradition Embraced

The farm, sometimes referred to as Stangerville, has been a landmark on historic West Maple Grove Road since 1836.

One of the family homes nestles under the mature trees that give a sense of stability to this farm.



Michelle Stanger.

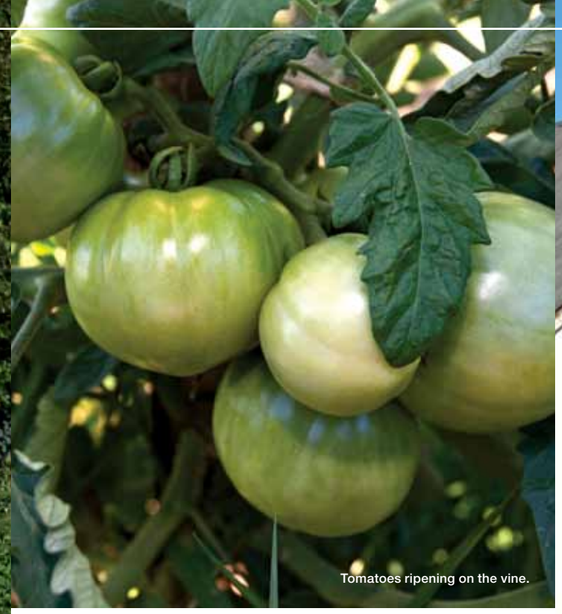
"We always plant a lot of vegetables so there is enough for all the wildlife as well as for us," says Michelle Stanger. "I don't mind sharing as long as they don't eat it all." The sharing takes place in Michelle's large vegetable garden near her home on the Stanger family farm as well as on two acres of corn she grows in an adjoining field.

The farm, sometimes referred to as Stangerville, has been a landmark on historic West Maple Grove Road since 1836. There are a number of homes and farm buildings and an expanse of cultivated fields set in a picture-postcard landscape on gently rolling hills. Mark (Grandad) Stanger, who was named farmer of the year a few years ago, still lives in the white farmhouse in which he was born and is a valued mentor for Michelle, who married Jimmy Stanger and moved from Bloomington to the farm three years ago. In the past two years, Michelle has cultivated about an acre of beans, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, potatoes, onions, squash, cantaloupe, and watermelons.

Although the garden is Michelle's enterprise, farming is a family tradition. Her husband Jimmy and her father-in-law Larry help her with the planting and picking of the vegetables. "This year Jimmy's daughter Ashlyn helped me plant all of the onions," Michelle says, "and nephew Clayton McCammon helped with the tomatoes. My mother-in-law, Diana, taught me how to can and make jams and jellies when I moved here, so now I can make Jimmy's favorite blackberry jelly from the blackberries in the surrounding woods." She also makes pies and crisps from homegrown rhubarb. A new specialization, making salsa, has been added to her repertoire, and daughter Suzanne assists with canning it.

Michelle Stanger sells some of her produce at the True Value hardware store in Ellettsville. "Since I love working in the garden so much, especially the peacefulness and the wonderful smell of the earth, I decided I might as well grow enough to sell some," she says.

And what about that hungry wildlife? Scarecrows with marigolds planted at their



Tomatoes ripening on the vine.

Lustrous purple onions and bicolor corn.

The intense blue of the sky makes the white barn with the Amish motif stand out in stark contrast.

feet help to discourage the birds from pecking at the corn. But, Stanger says, "the raccoons have parties in the outer rows of the corn, and they strip the ears and leave behind just the cobs and leaves. The squirrels live in the trees along the fence line and sometimes you can see ears of corn that they have carried up into the trees, so now we don't plant near the tree line. The rabbits, of course, prefer lettuce and nibble on things that are tender, and also there are plenty of deer. However, that is part of the beauty of living in the country and it all balances out."

Blessed with a curious mind and a desire to work with, not against, nature, this city girl has reinvented herself as the quintessential farm wife, a satisfying transformation, she says, because "you plant one seed and get all those beans and the more you pick the more you get. It is an ongoing miracle."

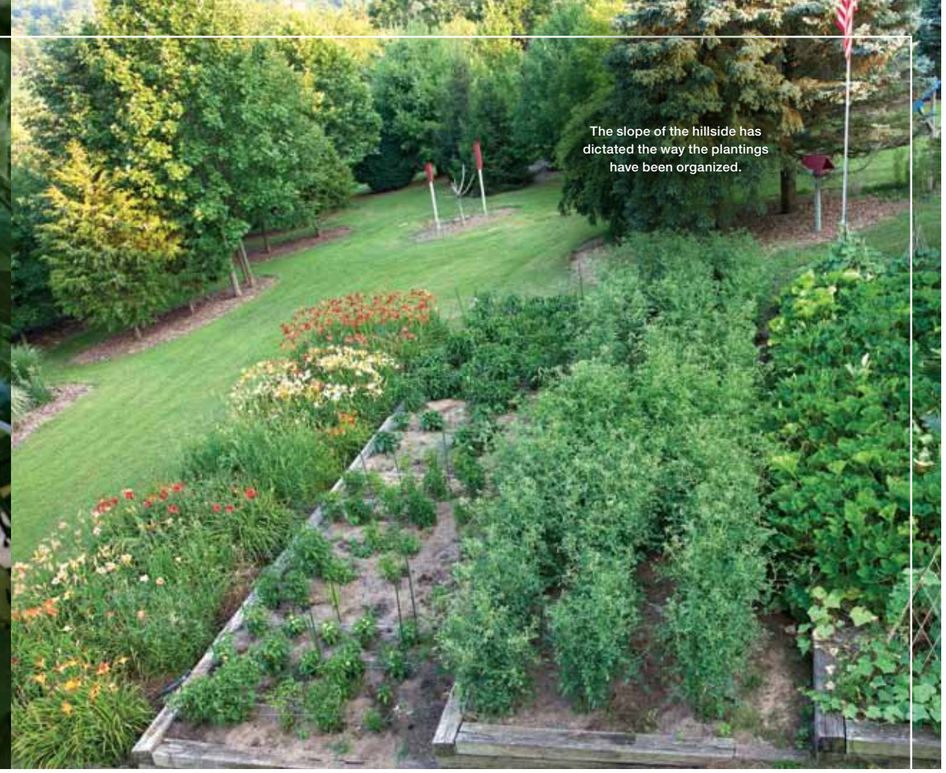
Vegetable GARDEN # 4

A *Bountiful* Haven ON A *Hillside*

Colorful daylilies bloom near a terrace of banana peppers.

‘Everything tastes the best when it goes from the garden to the kitchen to the mouth in just minutes.’

Gloria and Art Jacques | **West Howard Road**



The slope of the hillside has dictated the way the plantings have been organized.

One of Art Jacques’ bluebird houses.

Pattypan squash begin as little knobs but quickly grow bigger before one’s eyes.

Gloria Jacques holds a basket of multicolored peppers.

Nineteen years ago, when Gloria and Art Jacques bought a house on six sloping acres, there was a small wooded area at the back of the parcel, one pear tree, and a few cedars on the steepest terrain. Today that hillside on the outskirts of Bloomington’s west side is a cultivated and bountiful haven. There are berms containing mature trees and shrubs, raised beds overflowing with organically grown flowers and vegetables, and greenhouses where seeds are sown and tiny plants are laboriously separated and transplanted.

The couple says that tomatoes, squash, and peppers are easiest to grow and eggplants and cabbages take more time. Gloria says she loves to grow new varieties of vegetables as well as heirlooms, and she is well known at the Bloomington Community Farmers’ Market for the unusual varieties of produce she sells. Lately she is excited about a new white cherry tomato appropriately named Snowberry, a yellow paprika pepper that turns bright red when it is ready to pick, and a cucumber that is so small it can be eaten in a single bite.

“This year I have purple, white, and orange peppers,” she adds. “I went through the seed catalogues five or six times during the winter, thinking that everyone has reds and greens.” The earliest seeds, the herbs, are started in a greenhouse the first week in February, “as they take twenty-one to thirty-one days to germinate,” she explains.

Art and Gloria are both retired and love to cook, and “we have a great time planning our recipes depending on what we can harvest from the garden at any particular time,” says Gloria. “Everything tastes the best when it goes from the garden to the kitchen to the mouth in just minutes.” When she was growing up, she remembers, “Our family grew everything we ate, so I can’t bear to waste anything. For example, every tomato with a bad spot is popped into the pot to make soup.” She describes an easy recipe in which julienne summer squash is cooked with some onions and garlic and topped with grated cheese to make delicious vegetable hash browns.

Both say they feel fortunate to live next door to Stranger’s Hill Organics, as owner Dale Jones is knowledgeable and generous when they need to confer about organic practices. Art spreads 30 truckloads of wood mulch that is delivered by the power company each year and says that it helps prevent erosion on his sloping garden and unifies all of the plantings. He also has made 100 houses for Eastern bluebirds that help to keep insects under control.

This colorful and productive garden requires constant maintenance. It takes Art and Gloria about two hours on their two tractors just to mow the property. The mowing is easier because the trees and plantings are grouped together with swaths of lawn in between. In 2009 the couple built a tower with an observation deck from which they can enjoy wonderful views of the surrounding region—and their gardens.

Zucchini squash lying on black plastic, which prevents weeds from growing and mud from adhering to the produce on rainy days.

Basil with sliced tomatoes is one of summer’s tastiest treats.