



It Takes

HOW PARTNERS IN LIFE INTERLACE
THEIR SKILLS TO CREATE REMARKABLE
GARDENS.



By MOYA ANDREWS, photography by JAMES KELLAR

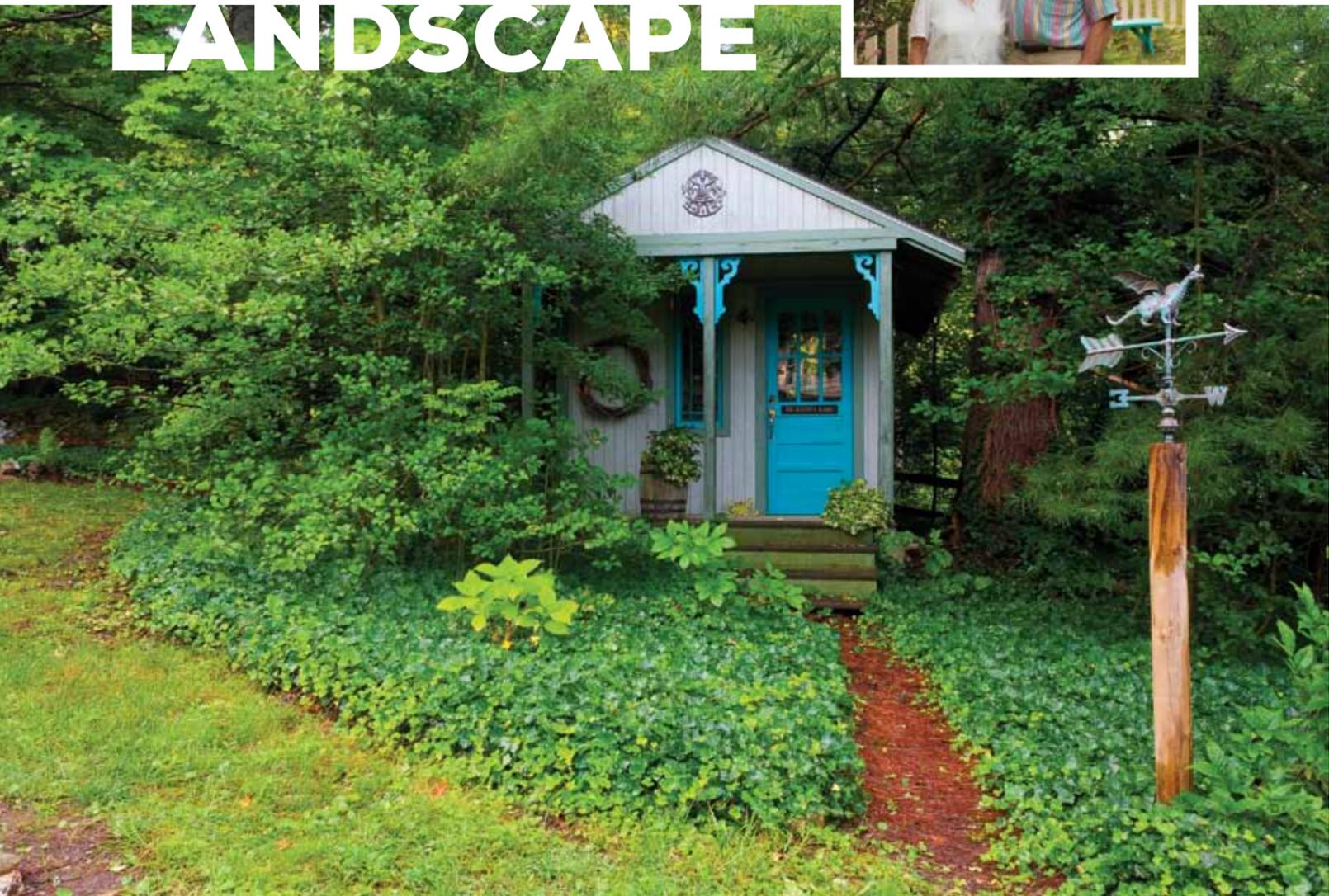
Gardening is a hobby that can be enjoyed as a solitary pursuit or as a collaborative activity. Large gardens often need more than one set of hands, but some people with small plots just enjoy working together to enhance the landscape they share. The dynamics likely are different in every gardening team: What is the division of labor? How are their individual talents and skills employed? How do they negotiate different objectives?

The three duos featured here, partners in life as well as in the garden, have answered those questions in unique ways that make for successful gardens and successful partnerships. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that one member of each pair is a woodworker whose handcrafted structures provide impact in the garden while blending seamlessly with the plantings. Gardens may be noted for their impermanence, but in each of these gardens — two in Bloomington's Elm Heights neighborhood and one in rural Spencer — their one-of-a-kind structures provide a sense of continuity.

True teamwork is on display in Bob Brookshire and Kris Floyd's Elm Heights backyard garden. Bob's lush beds of flowers in riotous colors provide a backdrop to the potted plants and art pieces featured in Kris' carefully curated vignettes.

INTIMATE SPACES IN A
LARGE
LANDSCAPE

VICTORIA *and* BILL WITTE



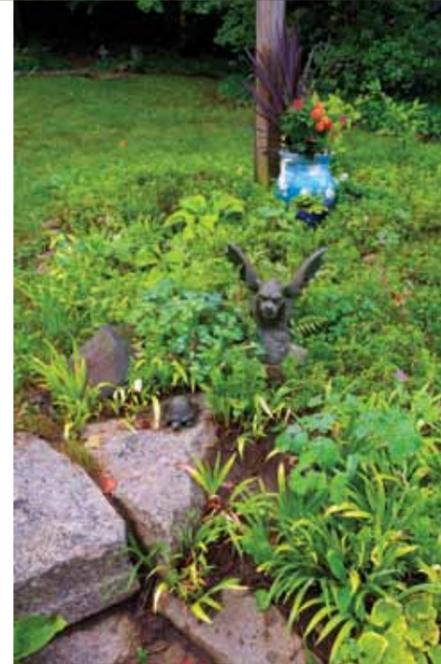
(inset) Victoria and Bill Witte.

The Wittes' charming garden shed looks more like a fairytale cottage than a home for the lawn mower. Turquoise trim adds a touch of whimsy and allows the structure to stand out from the trees surrounding it.

Victoria and Bill Witte have collaborated on improvements to their large corner lot on East Maxwell Lane since 1985, but, says Victoria, "There is a big difference in the way each of us approaches a project. Generally speaking, I just love messing around outdoors, but Bill wants to finish the particular project and then go on to the next thing." Despite these differences, the Wittes have covered all the bases when it comes to creativity in landscape design.

Bill, a retired Indiana University economics professor, insists that he knows nothing about plants.

"Victoria is the gardener in the family," he says. "I just like to build things." Victoria adds that with his woodworking projects, "Bill is really good at envisioning how something will look and fit with what is already in place. He is methodical, plans things out, draws up schematics to work from, and generally has a timeline for completion. I am completely different in my approach, but fortunately you have a lot more leeway when siting flower beds and deciding what to plant. If you don't like the shape of a bed, it is easy to reconfigure it. If a plant combination doesn't turn out as expected or the



(clockwise from top left)

Turquoise is repeated in colorful bursts throughout the garden, adding bright spots to the Wittes' yard all year long.

Another pop of bright blue in Victoria's herb garden.

Clever placement of the blue planter draws attention to the garden ornaments.

Knock Out roses stand sentinel at the entrance to the enclosed herb garden.

Informal groupings of flowering annuals in containers provide accents throughout the large garden.



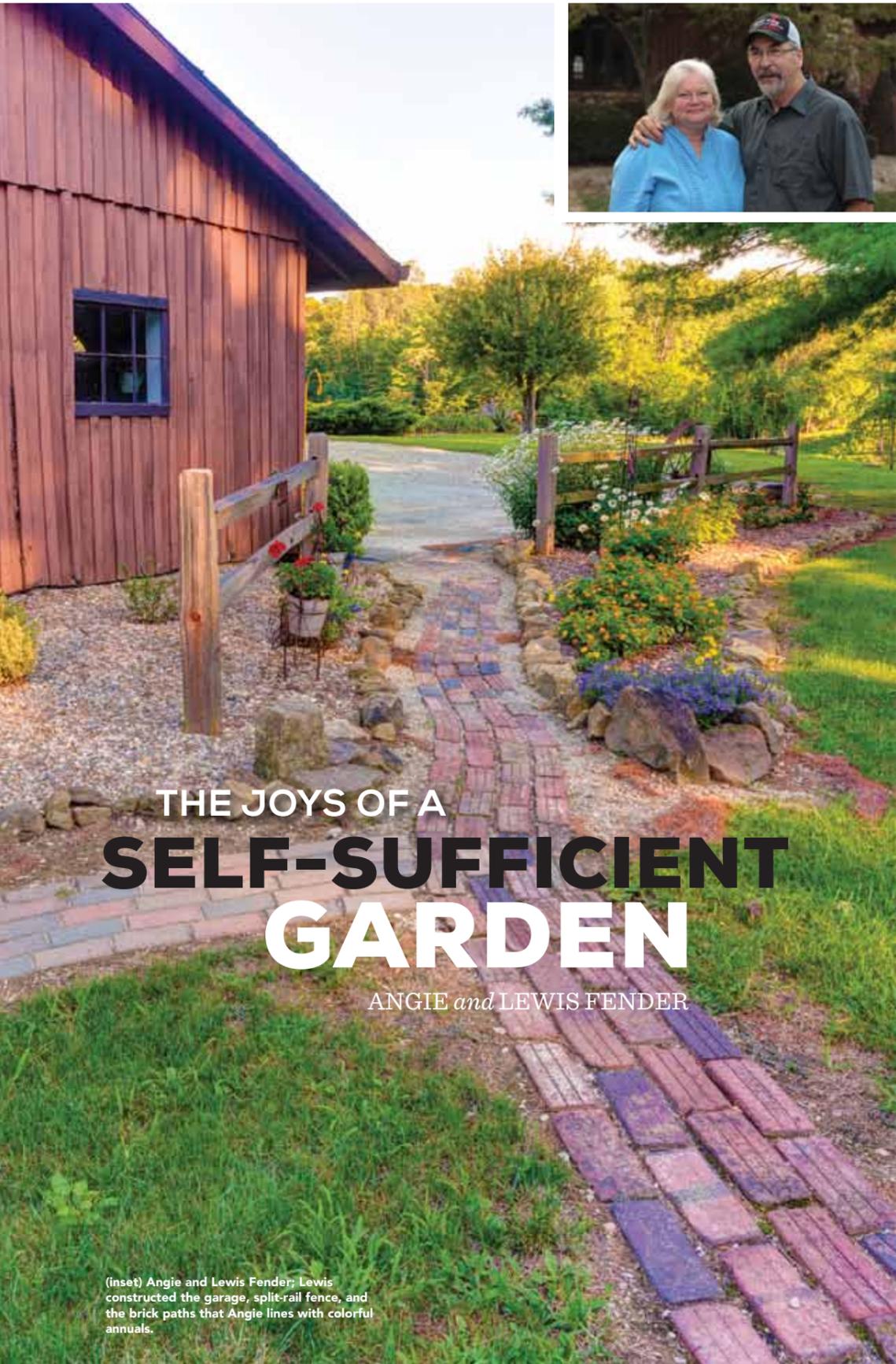
sun/shade situation isn't right for particular plants, you can change things after the fact."

It is evident that Bill is not only skillful but also enterprising. The shed he built behind the house incorporates many recycled materials. He found the windows in an antique store and the front door at a garage sale. He even thought to make a wide double door at the back, so the mower and garden carts fit inside easily, and he put translucent panels in the roof to let in natural light.

Although their approaches differ, the results of Victoria's and Bill's efforts always seem to mesh well. When Bill built two sections of a split-rail fence at a right angle near the street corner, Victoria chose a succession of eye-catching plants to nestle within its frame. Aster 'October Skies' with blue blooms in the fall, hibiscus 'Summer Storm' with large crimson flowers in the summer, and Ninebark, a native shrub with burgundy foliage and white spring blooms, ensures that those who pass by always have something to admire.

Both Wittes have a knack for creating accents and intimate spaces within their large landscape. For example, one day Bill asked Victoria if she would like a fence to enclose her herb garden. When she replied affirmatively, he went off to an auction, bought the wood, and created a charming, low, cream-colored fence that encloses her herbs in great style. Victoria, with typical flair, placed Knock Out roses at the entrance, providing bursts of red blooms throughout the season and enhancing the gray/green foliage of the herb plantings.

Victoria is heavily involved in the local Perennial Exchange, so she always has some perennial in bloom in her garden throughout the growing season as well as a succession of blooms from her shrubs and small flowering trees. She uses the color turquoise to integrate her varied plantings. The shed, the garden benches, the back door of the house, and a few ornaments are all painted in this matching shade. So even in winter when the plants are dormant, that vibrant color looks terrific against the white snow.



THE JOYS OF A SELF-SUFFICIENT GARDEN

ANGIE *and* LEWIS FENDER

(inset) Angie and Lewis Fender; Lewis constructed the garage, split-rail fence, and the brick paths that Angie lines with colorful annuals.



Angie and Lewis Fender married in 1974 and lived in a mobile home on their Rocky Hill Road site in rural Spencer while they built their house. It was their first significant project as a couple, but definitely not their last. The house includes a large basement where, each February, Angie starts many seeds that will be transplanted into their half-acre vegetable garden: tomatoes, broccoli, kohlrabi, beans, and much more. She experiments with different varieties and reports that ambrosia corn is a current favorite.

Early in their marriage, Lewis' mother taught Angie to cold pack, and later, after purchasing a pressure canner, she taught herself how to can low-acid vegetables and meat. She says she learned mainly from Ball canning books and now owns more than 3,000 Ball jars. Basement shelves overflow with jars of colorful preserved vegetables, jams, and jellies. Most of the food the Fenders eat year-round is produced on-site, including the soups Angie recently has begun making with her homegrown herbs.

Lewis is her chief taster and provides feedback and encouragement. "Angie tailors the recipes according to garden yields in any given year, but she also caters to the tastes of the eater, so I am a lucky man," Lewis says. "We rotate our crops and enjoy the variety and convenience of homegrown food all winter." Lewis and his brother, Steve, are in the meat processing business, and there is a two-and-a-half-acre man-made lake on the property that provides fish. "We are quite self-sufficient," he says.

Lewis' creativity is visible around the property. A full-size bear made from pinecones guards the front of the house



(clockwise from top left)

The home that Angie and Lewis built together features rustic charm and breathtaking views.

A sampling of the more than 3,000 jars of colorful canned produce, jams, and jellies Angie puts up in her basement.

The Fenders enjoy entertaining family in the shelter house overlooking their lake, complete with canoes and a zip line for the grandchildren.

Angie starts vegetable seeds in her basement. Later she'll transplant them to her half-acre garden.

A full-size bear, crafted from pinecones, stands guard at the front corner of the Fenders' house.

Luscious tomatoes from Angie's garden.



with colorful flowerbeds of annuals and perennials at its feet, and a bison, also made of pinecones, resides in a distant meadow. There are panoramic views across the lake and a causeway leading to the buildings where Lewis and Steve's business is housed. The home where the brothers grew up in a family of seven children still stands next to the business. "Whatever Steve and I needed growing up, we had to make ourselves," Lewis says, "and we still enjoy making what we need." That includes an outdoor shelter near the lake with handmade furniture, a stone fireplace, and a waterfall.

The Fender garden was featured on the Owen County Garden Club tour in 2007 and again in 2012. But Angie hastens to add that she can't spend much time in her flowerbeds when she and Lewis have a half-acre vegetable garden to plant. It's fortunate, she says, that they both like to garden. "Lewis likes to hoe and till; he digs the holes, and we both add the compost and plant," she says. "I took a composting class at Hilltop Garden & Nature Center and turned into an avid composter. It is important to be organic when growing food."

The Fenders share the work of the garden and take equal pleasure in the results. "We both enjoy the visual appeal of the rows of vegetables and berries," Angie says, "and we love to pick the fruits of our labors together. We both love to eat what we grow and share our extra produce with others."



A PASSION FOR FLOWERS CREATED A
**MAGICAL
 REFUGE**

BOB BROOKSHIRE *and* KRIS FLOYD



(inset) Bob Brookshire (left) and Kris Floyd with two of Bob's handcrafted bird feeders.

The careful placement and clean lines of the garden's art pieces create a feeling of organization among the casual plantings.

Bob Brookshire and Kris Floyd worked together in the garden behind their English Cottage-style home in Elm Heights for 14 years and created a magical refuge. Although the space is relatively small and full of many different types of plants, it does not feel crowded because of the care taken with the design.

"Since Bob was retired he did most of the garden maintenance and large individual projects," Kris says. Bob, who died in January, was a high school biology teacher and a botanist at heart. He was passionate about flowers and loved masses of them. He preferred plants with showy blooms in warm vibrant colors and hybridized his own daylilies. He used to say, "Let the plants take the lead. Either allow them to do their thing or move them." He admired the vigor of native plants, and he also appreciated leaf colors and textures and grew a wide variety of hostas that he had collected for years.

A consummate teacher, Bob could explain plant characteristics succinctly. For example, he pointed out the differences in stems by saying, "sedges have edges, rushes are round, and grasses have joints." He made wooden houses for birds and grew plants with berries to attract them. He planted pagoda dogwood, which draws catbirds, mockingbirds, and robins, and a serviceberry tree that the cedar waxwings love. Organic gardening is practiced in this landscape except when war is waged on the dandelion. The Brookshire approach is to cut off the plant and then dab a bit of Round-up Weed Killer onto the cut stem.

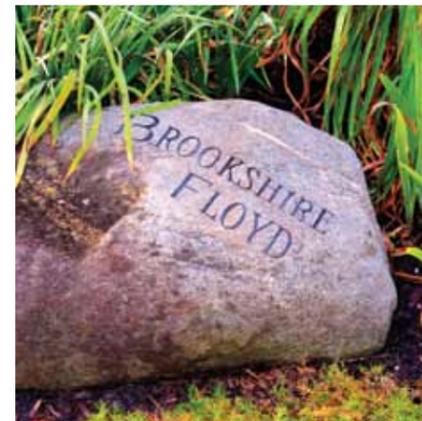
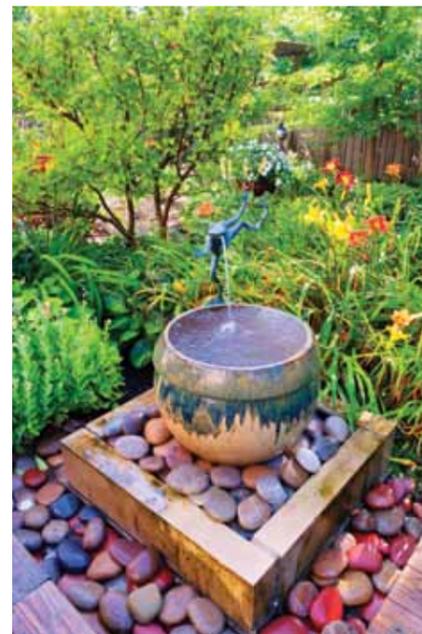
There is no grass in this garden, but Bob made boardwalk-style paths that allow for leisurely strolls around the plantings. He always said that a deck is best on the east side of a house so that the owners can eat dinner in the



shade every evening all summer. Of course, Bob built his own deck with an eastern aspect, and he and Kris enjoyed entertaining on it frequently.

Kris, an architect, enjoys creating the many small but striking vignettes incorporated into the overall landscape. After returning from work he unwinds by ensuring that there are crisp edges on the dwarf boxwood hedge and that all of the pots contain pleasing arrangements of plants that are pruned and deadheaded. Many of the large, handsome pots that either stand alone and contain a single plant or are part of strategically placed clusters of potted plants, were purchased at the Bloomington Arts Fair on the Square.

Kris is a master of the art of framing both the objects and the plants in unusual ways and trains the bittersweet and climbing hydrangea to soften the wooden privacy fence that Bob built. The tricolor beech tree is framed in an angle of the fence and glows when the sun hits its colorful leaves. Kris notes that the garden is an amalgamation of "Bob's swathes of riotous color and my need to control the minute details. We both had a lot of fun working on it together." ✨



(clockwise from top left)

In this grouping, Kris used small plants and containers to provide an interesting visual contrast with the large plant.

The garden shed is both functional and aesthetic — it stores garden tools and serves as an entrance to the garden from the driveway, often surprising visitors who have no idea of the beauty hiding behind the door.

On the street side of the fence, a stone carved with the homeowners' names identifies the residence.

Bob's trademark daylilies provide a colorful backdrop to a whimsical water feature.

Stones from Mays Greenhouse accent a garden fountain. The variety of colors adds visual interest, while the stones' uniform shape creates harmony.