

## Adapt Garden to Physical Limitations As Years Go By

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**W**eej Broderson looked around her garden paths, pergolas covered with flowering roses and beds filled with more roses, perennials and flowering shrubs, and asked herself:

"What is a woman my age doing with such a large garden?"

She had gardened in her native New York State, in Key West and in Vero Beach before coming to Tallahassee in 1988. She and her late husband Edwin bought an acre of kudzu infested land from her daughter Jan Alovus off Old St. Augustine Rd. and built a small cottage next door to their daughter's home and Grass Roots School.

"We mowed and mowed, and used Roundup on the kudzu. It took five years," she recalled.

Weej and Jan's planting began--native crabapple and other flowering trees, shrubs, kiwi vines, fruit trees, vegetables and flowers. Now mature, they fill the landscape.

Garden work kept her agile and strong, but as she nears eighty-two, Broderson said it has become harder to kneel down to pull the Florida betony weeds out of the perennial beds.

"The stiffness is almost like having a piece of rebar inserted from my hips to my knees," she laughs. "But I have no intention of giving up; I will just keep adapting the garden to my limitations." The changes are already underway. The perennials, which the weeds intertwined among the roses too closely to risk a spray of Roundup, have been taken out of the rose beds and placed in a separate border. Pink and white antique roses have their own border on the opposite side of the yard, fronted with the shrub *Plectranthus* 'Quicksilver'. All roses in her yard are the old garden variety that require no spraying and only minor pruning to remove dead canes. Broderson can do this chore while standing.

The beds have been consolidated, leaving a twenty-foot panel of grass in the middle, centered by a sun dial and yellow roses. Time is fleeting, it reminds passersby.

Broderson's time will be spent enjoying her garden and the pleasure her neighbors and friends also get from it. Neighbors come by to cut a bouquet of roses for a special occasion. Another neighbor held a big garden wedding there in early April. Her garden will also be included on the garden tours to be sponsored by the Friends of Maclay. "I will keep my garden because other people use it," she says.

Annette Folsom, a friend Broderson met while taking the Master Gardener class offered by the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension ten years ago, also has prudently planned for the time when she will have to curtail many of her garden chores.

She used to spend about three hours, three days a week tending the landscaped acreage she and her husband, Buck Folsom, live on out Thomasville Rd. A back problem last year caused her to rethink her love of flowers

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that included hundreds of varieties.

"I can no longer maintain perennials that need to be divided, so I have given them away. I now have annuals that reseed by themselves, and plant nothing that armadillos will root up."

Folsom has kept her antique roses and treats them like any other low-maintenance shrub. She trims out their dead wood and old canes when needed, and fertilizes them each spring. A border of 17 crepe myrtle trees requires no attention and provides a rainbow of color each summer.

A small pine grove fills one side of the property, self-mulched with pine straw. A path through the grove is highlighted with ferns and *Vinca major*. Bordering the woods are hydrangeas, abelias, camellias and oakleaf hydrangeas. Watering during dry summer months is their only requirement.

"I rely on ground covers," Folsom said in understatement. In her garden, they are everywhere there would otherwise be a bare spot for weeds to grow. She listed 17 varieties, in both botanical Latin and by common name. Wild ginger (*Asarum*), ajuga, Easter rose (*Heleborus hybridus*) mondo grass, *Vinca minor* and *V. major* are a few of the most frequently used.

With such a large tract of land, the Folsoms also have an expanse of lawn. One of her favorite things to do which she still does with ease is ride a lawn tractor over the grass. "While mowing, I like to look around and see what is happening," she said.

She now sees a flower laden landscape that offers more pleasure than work.

*Linda H. Yates is a Master Gardener volunteer and a member of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee. Photos to be credited to Linda Yates: Weej Broderson in her garden, Annette Folsom in her garden. For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>. [Back]*