Papa’s Garden Is a Special Place

Though we adults often enjoy our home gardens, a garden can truly be a magical place for children. Our first grandchild has taught me that.

I cannot, for the life of me, remember when our yard became a garden. I remember that first time looking at our new yard – an acre of grass with a few border plants around the foundation of the home. We dreamed of beds of azaleas, roses, hydrangeas and our favorite annuals and perennials. We hoped to capture the various seasons of color in the yard. We would have to deal with the movement of water across the landscape, the ever present issues of shade and sun, and soil that demanded to be enhanced after the construction of a new home.

After nurturing foundation plantings for three homes that we have purchased in Tallahassee over twenty-five years, we decided that we wanted professional help. For our current home, we retained a landscape engineer who took our dream and provided us with a landscape plan – a map of sorts with formal beds defined, a long list of shrubs, trees and plants and the ever present budget. We developed our landscape in stages over the years, and solved problems and issues as we went. A sloping backyard is now contained behind a stone wall and one side of our property became a riverbed by design to handle and contain water runoff. Another side yard has been labeled the “shade garden” because of the natural shade and plants that grow there. Hundreds of shrubs and trees have taken root and prospered. Maybe it was now time to stop, enjoy the yard, and watch the Knockout roses that bloom with brilliant color for all to see in our front yard!

Where has the time gone? Twelve years later, we believe that our landscape just might be complete. We’ve made numerous changes and additions to that original plan- some of our most hardy plants have been moved several times. We are especially proud of an Indian Hawthorn
tree – it has found a home after five moves and is doing great. A very special Japanese maple transplanted from our previous home has a new formal highlighted bed. We have added seasons of color throughout the landscape and formal walkways now circle our yard. Just recently, we spent a weekend adding brick pavers to a walkway that transitions our parking area to the backyard. Lightscaping was added to provide focal points to the landscape and enhance the visual presentation at night. We finally began to call our outside a garden.

In 2001, we were blessed to welcome our first grandchild. Her first steps included exploring our garden. In time, she has grown to accept the garden as her playground, a place where her imagination runs wild. Our entrance porch is her formal castle and she loves to place and monitor the plants we have growing there in large formal pots. She has identified a dungeon behind a wall of azaleas and wants me to plant some thorn bushes to maintain order. The backyard holds all the animals – unicorns hide and play among the oak leaf hydrangeas. The work shed serves as the stable for her herd of horses and one special pony. The birdbath serves as the home for the hippopotamus that must be on the lookout for the alligator that lurks nearby. The back steps are now the Good Ship Lollypop and the overhead awning a full sail of green and white. Captain Anne promises that all the animals take great care not to harm the garden as they run and play.

Anne and I take many long walks in the garden and she marvels as each plant, shrub and tree completes it cycle. She asks to pick a bouquet of flowers for her mother and Grandma. She searches for ladybugs and knows to stay away from the ants and bees. In simple terms, everything in our garden is simply “nature.”

Gardens, after a fashion, deserve a name. Anne named ours – Papa’s Garden. As she has progressed this year in her kindergarten program, she has learned the names of the flowers, shrubs and the trees. She surprised me this past fall when she lectured me on evergreen trees – why they retain their leaves over the winter.

We hope our new grandson Jackson will learn to appreciate our garden. We might have to make a few changes to handle a fort and I know a special place that will make a great spot to capture those pirates who surely will be just beyond the fence.

I hope you have the opportunity to spend special moments in your yard and garden with family and friends. With a lot of love and care, you might create a magical space with a special name and if you are very lucky, it just may become “Papa’s Garden.”

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