




# HOW DOES HER GARDEN GROW?



WITH  
PATIENCE,  
FLEXIBILITY  
AND A  
GENEROUS  
SPIRIT

BY DAWN LILES

PHOTOS BY  
RAY SEPESEY

MASTER GARDENER SUSAN LIPSEY is the quintessential picture of the modern Southern gardener. She is a health-conscious, sustainable-living advocate with an eye for aesthetics in both her garden and home. She also has a generous and giving spirit.

Her abundant

garden in Providence Downs is well planned and designed but uncomplicated and changeable. "Gardening is an experiment," Lipsey says. "If you try something and it doesn't work, you can replace it with something else." Her method for tracking





“I HAVE  
SO MANY  
WINDOWS VIEWING  
MY OUTDOOR  
GARDENS THAT I FEEL  
LIKE THE GARDEN IS  
ALREADY INSIDE WITH  
US. IT’S BETTER THAN  
A PAINTING!”

MASTER GARDENER  
SUSAN LIPSEY





what works and what doesn't is as uncomplicated as her garden. She keeps a large three-ring binder filled with tags, taped to the pages, of plants, flowers and vegetables she grows. She makes notes next to each tag about when the item was planted and how it fared in her garden. A lifelong gardener, she earned the designation of master gardener in 2011 through the Extension Master Gardeners of Union County. To earn the designation, participants complete 10 classes on a range of gardening topics and pass a final exam.

In her garden, she easily mixes flowers, shrubs, vegetable plants and herbs in raised beds and wooded areas of her backyard. Her flower gardens include ginger lilies, zinnias, oakleaf hydrangeas, coneflowers, Shasta daisies, lantana, drift roses, morning glories, Russian sage, wisteria, pineapple lilies, sunflowers, creeping jasmine and black-eyed Susans, interspersed with herbs such as tarragon, oregano, thyme, sage and basil.

She grows vegetables such as green beans, butternut squash, okra and fennel in raised beds, which reside near beds of strawberries and several blueberry and blackberry bushes.

Last spring, she grew tomato plants indoors from seed, which involved planting organic seeds in a seed-starting mix and placing them under fluorescent grow lights to maintain a consistent temperature of 75 to 85 degrees. Seeds need 12 hours of light per day to germinate. "The main



The backyard garden in Providence Downs reflects a wide variety of plants.

continued on page 40



■ continued from page 37

reason for growing tomatoes from seed is to guarantee the plants are non-GMO heirloom," says Lipsey. Her resulting tomato plants became a focal point of her 2015 garden.

**Sharing the Dirt on Soil**

Nutrient-rich soil is the foundation for a beautiful garden. Lipsey improves her soil through vermicomposting using red wiggler worms, which break down food scraps and create microorganisms beneficial to the soil. An alternative is to make vermi tea from the worm castings and spray it on plants for natural protection against plant diseases. On top of her garden's healthy compost layers, she prefers mulch, mainly because it retains moisture better than pine straw.

Another natural, chemical-free and inexpensive method Lipsey prefers for building her garden is called "lasagna gardening." The name refers not to the pasta but to layering organic materials that will be absorbed over time, resulting in rich soil that helps plants thrive.

Lasagna gardening creates new beds through several simple steps, Lipsey says. First, take cardboard, remove all the tape and break it down to flat pieces. Then cover the new bedding area with a layer of cardboard, making sure to overlap grass or weed areas so nothing can grow. Cover the cardboard with a three-inch layer of compost, and then cover the compost layer with wood mulch. The bed will need to lie dormant for

**TWC WEALTH MANAGEMENT**

*Conveniently located in Ballantyne*

**THE FINANCE COUPLE™**

*We believe wealth management is a process, not a product!*

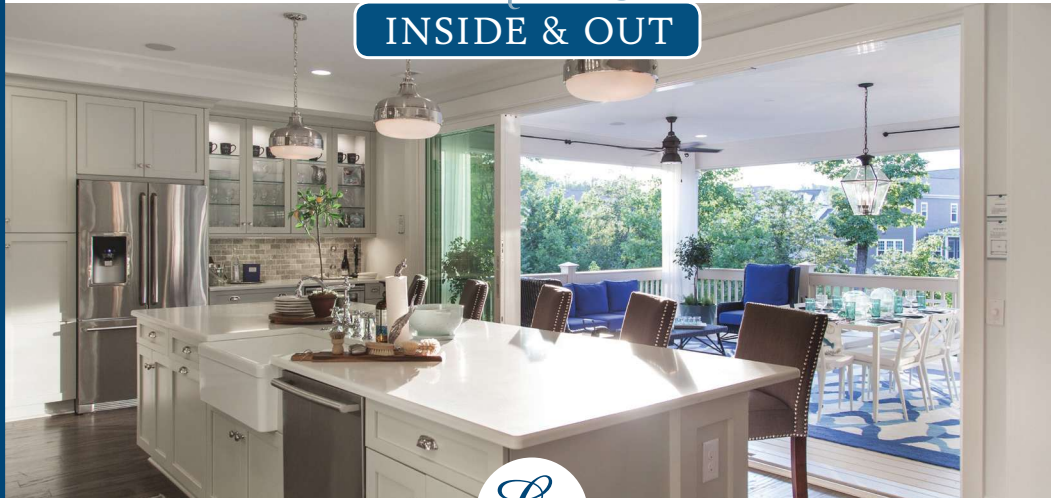


**TheFinanceCouple.com**  
**704-499-9703**

**R. Timothy Curran, JD, CFP®**  
**Wynne B. Curran, Financial Advisor**

Securities offered through LPL Financial, Member FINRA/SIPC. Investment advice offered through TWC Wealth Management, a registered investment advisor. The Finance Couple and TWC Wealth Management are separate entities from LPL Financial.

**SIMPLY *the Best* IN DESIGN**  
**INSIDE & OUT**



Sunlit Walkout Basement  
Homesites Available

**Cureton**  
\$600's - \$800's  
2900 McPherson St  
Waxhaw, NC 28173  
704-243-0032

**CLASSICA**  
HOMES DESIGNED FOR LIVING

**The Meadows at Cheval**  
\$500's - \$700's  
13620 Castleford Dr  
Mint Hill, NC 28227  
704-573-2800

Models open daily at  
all 3 Neighborhoods

**Providence Retreat**  
mid \$600's to \$800's  
4428 Country Lane  
Charlotte, NC 28270  
704-507-2907

ClassicaHomes.com

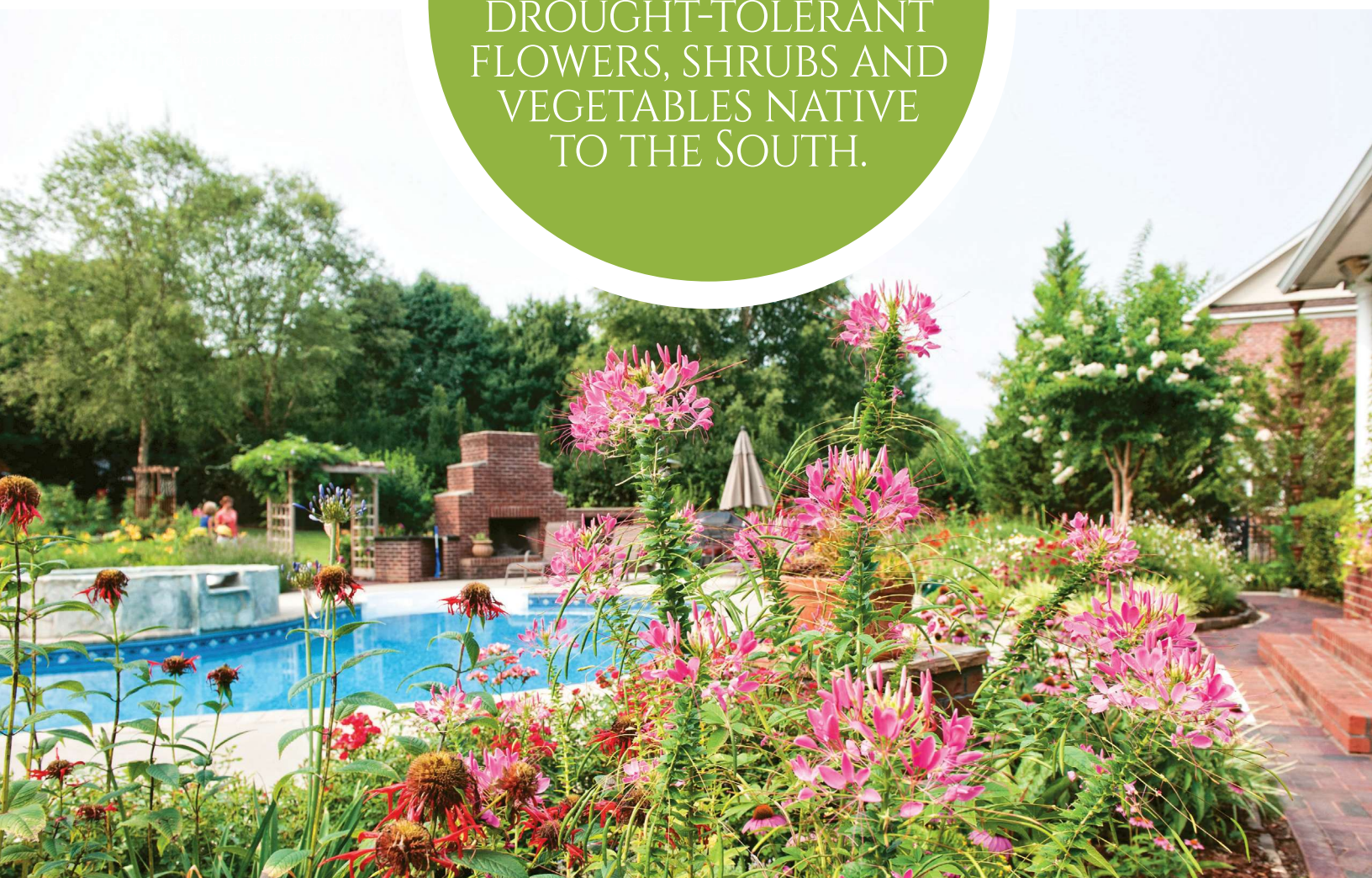


2014 & 2015 Charlotte Builder of the Year

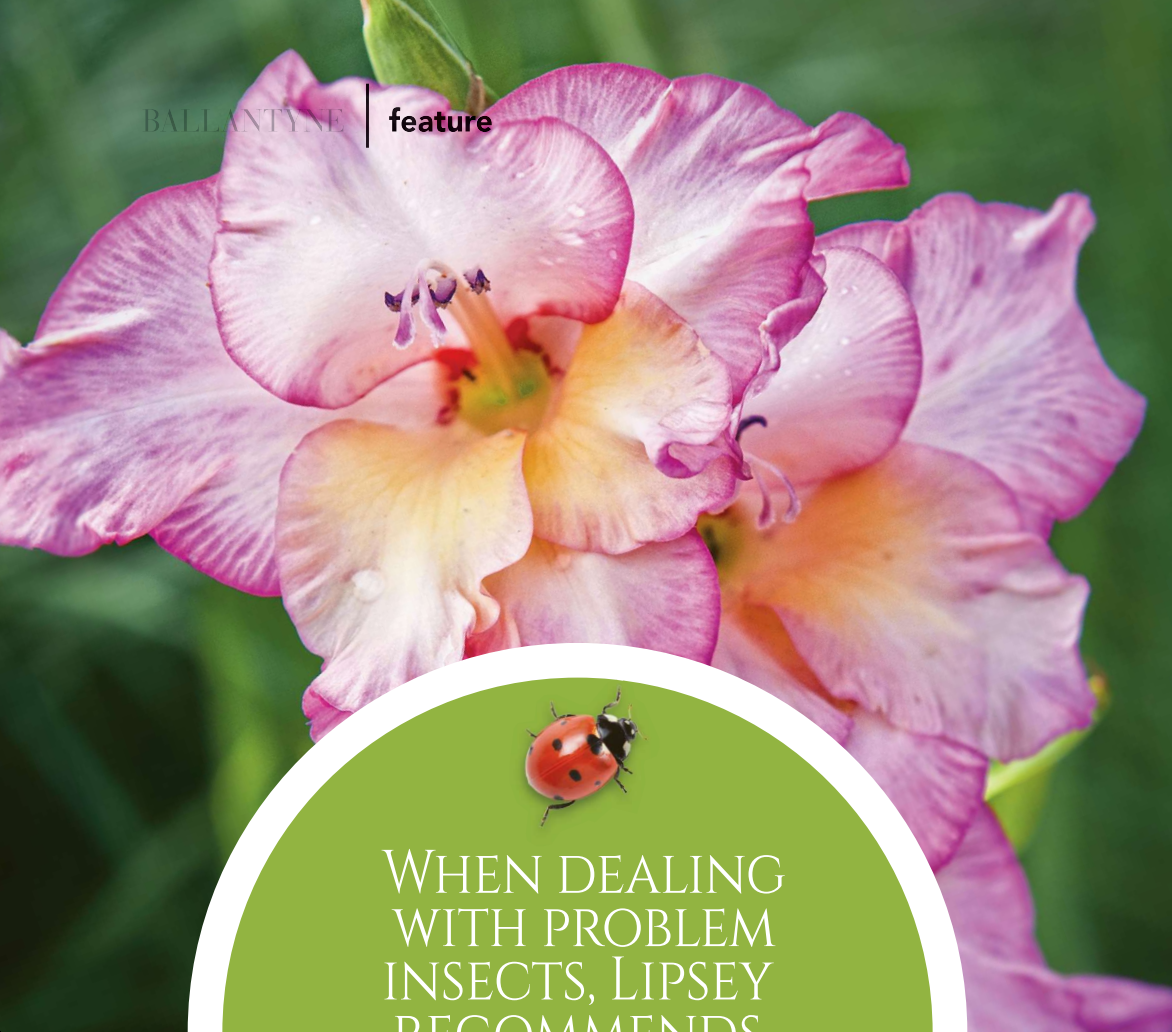




THE MAJORITY  
OF THE TIME, LIPSEY'S  
GARDEN THRIVES  
BECAUSE SHE PLANTS  
DROUGHT-TOLERANT  
FLOWERS, SHRUBS AND  
VEGETABLES NATIVE  
TO THE SOUTH.







WHEN DEALING WITH PROBLEM INSECTS, LIPSEY RECOMMENDS USING AN ORGANIC SOLUTION SUCH AS HORTICULTURAL OIL OR NEEM OIL.



at least six months before planting. This allows time for the worms and beneficial insects to come and help kill the grass and weed areas and decompose the cardboard.

### Weed, Pest Control

The majority of the time, Lipsey's garden thrives because she plants drought-tolerant flowers, shrubs and vegetables native to the South. Even her praying mantises, which are a safe alternative to pesticides for controlling insects and bugs, are native to the area. "You want to look for the brown Carolina praying mantis," she says. "The green ones are from Asia and are not native. Why introduce something foreign into your garden?" When dealing with problem insects, Lipsey recommends using an organic solution such as horticultural oil or neem oil. Both can be purchased online, at garden stores and are safe for bee pollinators.

For killing weeds, she suggests two alternatives to chemicals. For the first, combine one gallon of vinegar with one ounce of dish soap in a spray bottle. Generously spray weeds in the garden, but only when the forecast calls for two consecutive days of sunshine. A second method, using baking soda, is mainly used for eliminating weeds in sidewalks and pavement areas. Simply take the powdered baking soda and sweep it into cracks and pavement spaces.

continued on page 44

The garden is a blend of flowers, shrubs, vegetables and herbs.



■ continued from page 42

### Giving Nature

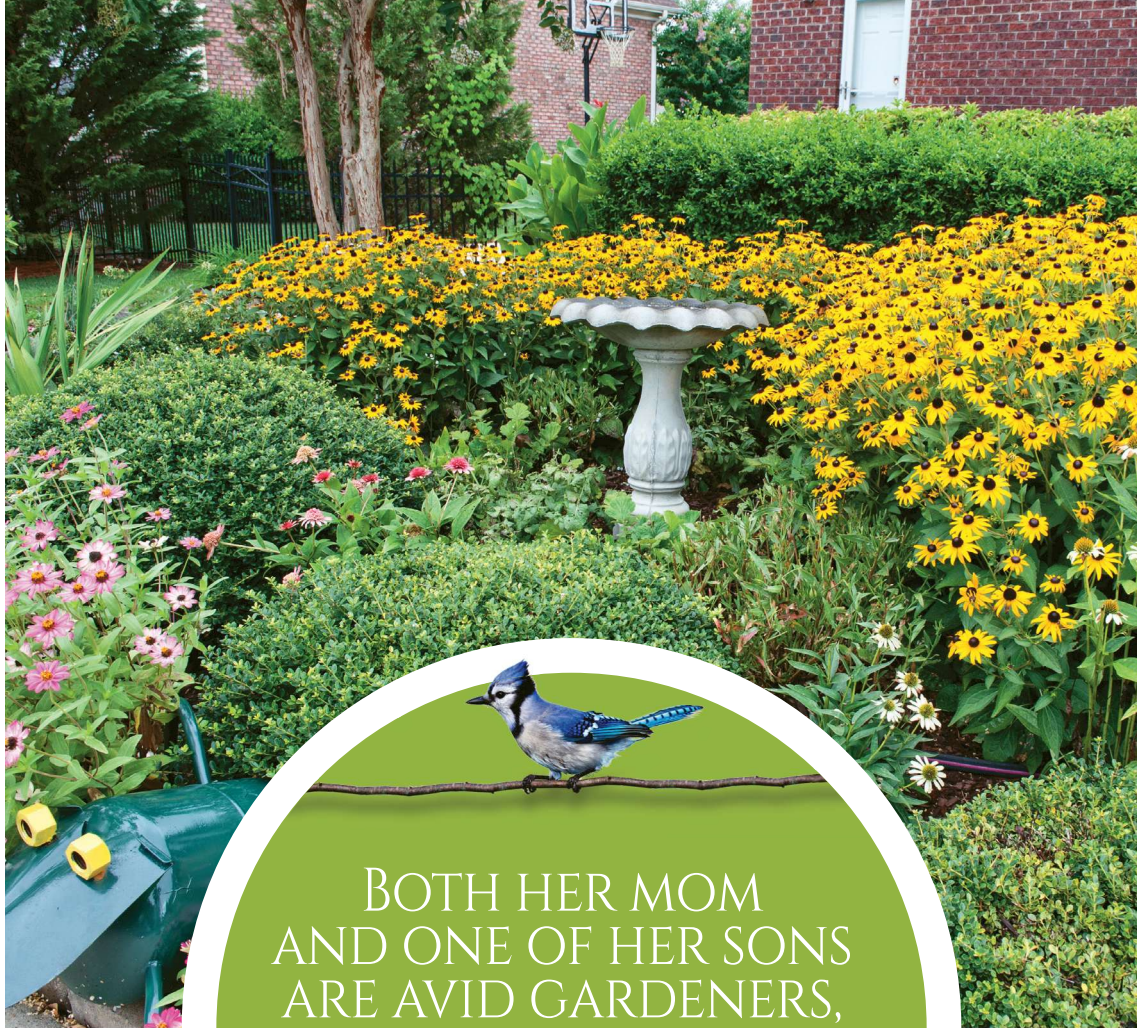
Lipsey’s lifelong interest in plants began when she was a little girl, gardening next to her mother. “My mom is now almost 80 and is still a big gardener,” Lipsey says. “She has 48 tomato plants and shares her tomatoes with friends and family.”

That sense of sharing and community is big in Lipsey’s family. Both her mom and one of her sons are avid gardeners, and they all offer vegetables and cuttings to everyone they know. It’s rare, however, that Lipsey cuts flowers to bring indoors. “I think it’s mainly because I have so many windows viewing my outdoor gardens that I feel like the garden is already inside with us. It’s better than a painting!”

Her generous nature extends beyond the garden to her work as a guardian ad litem, a volunteer advocate appointed by the court to support the rights and best interests of a child involved in a court proceeding. Lipsey would like to see others volunteer as well. More than 150 children in Mecklenburg County are in need of a guardian ad litem, she says.

Perhaps her philosophy of life can be best summed up in a quote from alternative medicine guru Deepak Chopra that serves as a tagline on her emails: “If we share with caring, lightheartedness and love, we will create abundance and joy for each other. And then this moment will have been worthwhile.”

Coneflowers (right) are among many perennials (top) in the lush landscape.



BOTH HER MOM  
AND ONE OF HER SONS  
ARE AVID GARDENERS,  
AND THEY ALL OFFER  
VEGETABLES AND  
CUTTINGS TO  
EVERYONE  
THEY KNOW.

