

St. Henry gardening experts pass along their knowledge

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hairspray. Then, the plane glides up and into the hydrangea-blue sky. Jackie reckons it is heading for Huntingburg Regional Airport.

Most folks would find Wagner's 'big sky' location quite phenomenal, but for Jackie (who remarks, "God has given us so much") this is everyday life.

The last garden I tour belongs to Roman Wendholt (parents the late Mildred and Albinus), who meets me dressed in a terracotta t-shirt and sandy-colored cargo shorts.

Garages, eye-catching old barns, out buildings, a smoking shed, an outhouse (still serviceable) and a handsome summer kitchen are original and still decorate

Wendholt's ancestral property. From the top of the driveway, fields of bushy grass, gravel trails, houses, pasture and farmland are set in place by an assortment of fencing, irrigation lines and strands of puffy forest. Wendholt's predecessors settled on a hill so high that the view is laid out like a game board.

"I mean *look at it*," Roman says with admiration. "I can sit up-front on the swing out here and just look down through the bottom. I enjoy it. I do."

These days, he rents the sizable farmhouse to a young couple (lucky folks!), while he maintains the garden (60 x 85 feet), lawn and plantings. (A second, smaller garden for potatoes and corn hides behind a small shed.) The property size and scope make caring for

the place a big job.

"I pretty well take care of it all," says Roman, which brings us to the first of seven traits the St. Henry experts share...

1) They're in the garden every day.

It has been previously noted that each of the interviewees met me in work clothes. That's because each of them *was working*.

"You've got to keep out the weeds, because they grow faster than your plants!" Jackie exclaims.

Both Wagner and Wendholt confess to having "cleaned up" their gardens prior to my visit, and all three gardeners concur: weeds are annoying and possibly the greatest source of struggle for gardeners. Yet, as we discuss their habits, it seems the experts wouldn't have it any other way than to be plucking and pulling, snipping and digging seemingly without end.

After a long day at work, all three gardeners retreat to their vegetable domains. "Sometime before the evening's out, I make my way down here. Whether it's all dying or not," laughs Henke. (Each enthusiast laments the water-logged state of their gardens in early July. More on that later.)

Paul goes so far as to say he wishes he could garden in winter. "I wish I could do it then too," he reflects, "because it's what I *do*. It keeps me doing something. If I don't have nothing else to do, I can *always* come out here and do something." It would seem that for Henke the busy-work of gardening is experienced as grounding, relaxing.

The others feel the same.

"I call it stress relief," tells Wendholt. "I can come out here — like yesterday and this morning — my shirt was just soaking wet but I enjoyed it. I enjoy doing this."

2) They learned from older generations.

Wendholt and Wagner both grew up in St. Henry and now live short distances from their childhood homes.

Wagner shows off her hand-me-down plants: a hardy line of rhubarb just beginning to blush rests in the spot it inhabited when she bought the house; at the edge of the vegetable garden, a patch of rascally asparagus attempts to crowd the remnants of this season's strawberries; and mature peach, apple and pear trees give the yard romantic shade. In late Spring, to the gardener's surprise,

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Roman Wendholt and his wife, Karen, discuss his pepper plants. Note the row of sweet-colored zinnias, brilliant red cannas and hardy corn.

photo by Casey Uebelhor



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