

# Gardeners and their gardens

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of their gardens. One row of Henke's garden was littered with tiny bluegill, caught only days before, and now being used as fertilizer. Wagner's garden benefits from farm animal fertilizers collected around her homesteads. She particularly hailed rabbit fertilizer as incredibly useful.

**4) They keep up traditions with no fear of experimentation.**

Wendholt upholds a tradition of flower cultivation. Rows of peonies and irises are past their bloom in early July, but if the hardiness of their leaves serves as indication, the florals must have been plentiful and stunning. They have existed on the property as long as Wendholt can remember.

He digs up and replants a variety of ribosomes and bulbs yearly, including sunset-red cannas, large and dramatic dahlias and gorgeous lilies. The bulbs procreate as they grow, making the plants practically eternal if cared for properly. Bulbs are separated and stored in between seasons.

A bed of happy, multi-colored zinnias is replanted from year to year and keeps in tradition with Wendholt's mother's garden

plan. Tiny zinnia seeds (small as poppy seeds) are compressed in the center of the single, long stem flowers, and crowned by yellow stamen. Roman collects the seeds, dries and stores them. "I remember helping her pick them," he tells of zinnias. "We'd put them on newspaper, put them in the back of the car, and then she'd go to church at St. Henry. They put them on the altar for Sunday."

For years, Jackie has collected, saved and replanted peanuts inherited from her father. "Nobody hardly does them anymore," she explains. "My dad always grew them. My dad always made peanut brittle at Christmas time."

Her father gifted her some of his peanut seeds 26 years ago. He quit planting them, and Jackie began. She tells how she nearly lost the crop some ten seasons ago and had to salvage as many as she could. "I almost ran out of seed, because it had been so wet, and the moles love to eat them."

Jackie relates her first attempt at carrying out her father's tradition of making peanut brittle. In short, her efforts resulted in more of the sticky-gooey concoction on the table and floor than on the pan, but amid the mess, she and her mother made a sweet memory

filled with laughter. Her story reminds that traditions transform from generation to generation, and in the attempt alone joy can be found.

12-day, 13-day, 14-day pickles — whatever they're called (and however long they process) all three experts make them, just like their ancestors. For Henke, it's a tradition he's attempting to recreate.

Henke's cucumbers flourished particularly well this year. (Henke — like Jackie and Roman — doesn't refer to the cucumber as a 'cucumber,' he refers to the crop by its intended finality — *pickles*.) By July 5, he had already given handfuls away and picked at least three during our interview, and for a family get together on the fourth, Henke served a summer favorite, a cool and refreshing cucumber salad.

"I'm experimenting right now," he tells me. "My mom and dad used to make salt water pickles. They made them in a crock." Internet research led Henke to a method that allows for old-time pickling to be done in jars. "I've actually got five jars in there now," he says, "and they'll be done in two weeks."

"Man there's a big one in there," he remarks,

leaning forward. His forearms disappear into a mess of vines and fan-sized leaves. "You don't want them to get too big. They get bitter if they get too big."

**5) They preserve their crop.**

Pickles are just the beginning.

Jams, jellies, pies, soups, salsas — many long lasting foods can be made from what the garden yields. Canning (beans, tomatoes, squash, potatoes, etc.) and freezing (almost anything including winter squash and corn) are favorite methods of preservation. Root vegetables are stored in cellars and basements, from which potatoes, sweet potatoes and turnips can be eaten well into the winter.

Combined, the expert gardeners make and preserve anything and everything and by every method. (Jackie harvested 11 heads of cabbage the week before our tour, and as we talked, the cabbage brewed away in crocks, soon to be delicious, homemade sauerkraut.)

And though none of the three experts make wine from their own grapes, they have certainly had experience in the past. Roman in particular tells of a large grape arbor that

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