

# Mobile garden solves the ‘not enough space’ quandary

Thanks to Holmes Community College, I’m still driving my antique pickup truck all over, still with the celebrated garden growing in the back.

It started some thirty years ago, when someone whined about not having a place to garden, spurring me to turn frustration into hope. To paraphrase Dr. Seuss, “A garden is a garden, no matter how small.”



FELDER RUSHING

By the end of the summer, the little “pillow garden” produced flowers, tomatoes, and peppers. The next year I went with a larger bag of potting soil and more plants, learning which could or couldn’t take wind and radiated parking lot or driveway heat.

I finally went whole-hog by having a metal box custom-fitted to the truck bed, with holes along the back edge so water would drain easily. Filled it with a light-weight soil mix and began experimenting with what can take the harsh conditions. Whenever something did poorly, I simply pulled it out and stuck something different in the hole.

I pulled it off in the worst imaginable condition for gardening – in the back of my hard-working truck. I mean, if I can grow vegetables, herbs, flowers, and small shrubs in that version of Horticultural Hades, anyone should be able to do better somewhere more suitable. Right?

I started with a bag of potting soil stuffed with a few plants and some fertilizer, pushed up against the cab in that windless eddy that anyone who ever rode in the back of a truck knows about.

Over the years I’ve found small evergreen shrubs, flowering and foliage perennials, succulents, and annuals including compact vegetables and culinary herbs that can take extreme heat, deep freezes, sparse watering, and gusts of wind. With only occasional replacements, a little weed-



Felder’s impossible truck garden.

ing, and twice-a-year swapping out heat-loving summer basil, peppers, and little zinnias with cold-tolerant winter kale, parsley, and violas, the garden has remained completely packed with plants of all shapes, colors, and textures.

I’ve seen butterflies supping there, had a nest of little black ants for several years, and found earthworms churning my mulch into rick compost. Oh, and because I tend to over-accessorize, in addition to a pair of custom-

made bottle tree sconces, I added an old garden gnome, a copper frog, birdhouse, nicely-shaped little boulder, and a Slow Gardening sign (ironic, huh?). Even the sideboards of my truck are festooned with a row of Sunflower County license plates, a gift from the mayor of my truck’s hometown. Over the decades, the garden has crisscrossed the eastern half of the US - 34 states – and every county in Mississippi. It’s tooled along Holmes County backroads many times.

A couple of years ago, in a sort of windfall incident, the truck was stolen but quickly recovered after a public uproar; however, it had been stripped of everything except the garden box and dirt.

But Jim Haffey, President of HCC, quickly stepped up and had the truck restored as part of the curriculum of the Auto Collision Repair Technology program on the Goodman campus, including taking out all the dents, straightening the steel bumper, and repainting it a brilliant John Deere Green in honor of our state’s agricultural roots.

I replanted the garden,

and we’re back on the road in better style than ever. You can see before, after, and in-process images on my blog, plus a “Mississippi Roads” video of the whole HCC refurbishing and my replanting, done by Mississippi Public Broadcasting.

Meanwhile, with its new lease of life, the old truck and its vibrant herb and flower garden continue merrily down the road. Hope to run into you someday. No literally of course.

Felder Rushing is an 11th-generation American gardener who has traveled to all fifty states (lectured in 36) and across five continents looking for interesting gardening angles to share via his extensive lecturing, writing and broadcasting. The graduate horticulturist and free-thinking university professor has written syndicated newspaper columns for 38 years and hosted a live radio program for nearly that long, including 15 years now as the weekly host of The Gestalt Gardener, one of National Public Radio’s most popular gardening programs. Email gardening questions to [rushingfelder@yahoo.com](mailto:rushingfelder@yahoo.com)

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