

# Garden For All Seasons

*Donald S. Dimond*

It goes back to the fall of 1966 when a small group of history volunteers formed a committee that would be responsible for placing fresh flowers twice a week in the Queen Anne Cottage and Hugo Reid Adobe. At the time, it seemed no great problem. The flowers would come from the display garden and other sections of the Arboretum and, maybe, from a few private gardens. As it turned out, the principal source proved to be the nearby McCaskill Nursery whose co-owner just happened to be the committee chairman, Mrs. Billie McCaskill.

But unforeseen problems arose. As the Arboretum grew, so did the demand for fresh cut flowers. They were needed for important luncheon meetings and for a variety of special events. And, it was nice to have them available every month of the year, even though that was beyond the capacity of most gardens. Then, the display garden was temporarily removed to make way for the new meadowbrook project; no more flowers would come from that source for awhile. A few years later, the volunteers—or Las Voluntarias as they had become known under their corporate title — had an idea and an opportunity at the same time. Chewing the matter over one day at an informal meeting, the idea popped out. Why not grow our own? The question seemed as obvious as it was logical. Like many good ideas, the real question was the implementation. Manpower and land were the immediate needs. It happened that about three-quarters of an acre of land paralleling the west side of the road leading to the begonia and orchid green-

houses had been more or less fallow for some time. It was available.

In October, 1972, John Provine, then chief horticulturist at the Arboretum, asked Jane Buck, chairman of the volunteers' flower-arranging committee and a three-year member of the California Arboretum Foundation, to set up the garden. He gave her three weeks to do the job. It was just as well; Jane was eight-months pregnant at the time. But, having lived on a farm all her life, she knew how to get a horticultural job done. With help from the Ortho Chemical Company, which donated flowers, vegetables, fertilizers and other materials, she laid out the garden, deciding what and where to plant. The timing was just right. The day after helping to plant the first flowers she had her baby. Occupied today with motherhood, Mrs. Buck has had to limit her volunteer activities. But, she still arranges flowers each week in the Demonstration Home Gardens with the assistance of a committee of five, only one less than the number of people she had helping her in laying out the entire Garden For All Seasons.

Anne Lanselle took over after Jane Buck had her baby. At the time, it was intended that the garden be just a cutting garden, judiciously planted so that fresh flowers would be available the year round. But if flowers could be grown throughout the year, why not vegetables? Southern Californians could come to the Arboretum any time of the year and see flowers and vegetables growing side by side, the esthetic and the practical in perfect compatibility. So, during 1973, Anne



Lanselle led the development of the garden and it was she who got the vegetables going in addition to furthering her interest in planting one-of-a-kind of rare or unusual plants.

In January of 1974, Louise Phelps and George Jack took over as co-chairmen. Louise had been a Foundation member for eight years and had taught classes in the Youth Education program along with

George Jack is a retired telephone executive who did his first gardening while he was living in Hempstead, Long Island. As a daily commuter to Kennedy Airport where he was overseeing the business aspects of a highly complicated telephone installation, he had plenty of time to plan his watering and planting schedules. George joined Las Voluntarias in January, 1973, and became at



*George Jack and Louise Phelps, co-chairmen of Garden For All Seasons.*

Diane Martin when Gertrude Woods was head of that section. Gertrude later became chief of the Education Division. She retired last year. Diane is now teaching a vegetable gardening class in the Department's Adult Education-Pasadena City College program and maintains, with the help of Vito Amato, another volunteer, the vegetable plots located just north of the Garden For All Seasons that are used in her class work. Louise credits Gertrude Woods for her basic training in gardening. This experience, plus experiments in her own garden and classes with Lydia Birt Williams, member of the Adult Education teaching staff, have made her a very knowledgeable gardener.

the same time a member of the Foundation, as are all members of Las Voluntarias. George Jack and Louise Phelps speak softly, work hard, and lead what must be the most democratically run volunteer group ever brought together. There are about 20 workers on the roster, 14 of them active. Sixty percent are women. For all practical purposes, they can do anything they want. No one is "assigned" to any particular task. This seemingly *laissez faire* policy is not so inefficient as it sounds. There is so much to do, and so much to do that obviously needs being done, that if one person wants to water, another to weed, and another to plant, all can be satisfied to



THEN . .



NOW . .





the benefit of the garden. In any case, no one gets any direction unless it's asked for. The workers, for this is what they are, average one day a week, four hours a session. Both George and Louise are happy to "pay to work," as George has observed, more hours than this. It is a little more difficult for Louise because she now lives in Long Beach. But to balance it out, George represents Louise at the Las Voluntarias board meetings and takes notes.

Any of the volunteer gardeners can suggest something to plant and, if it's possible, John Provine will get it. Very little seeding is done; most of the plants come in pony packs. During lunch, notes are made in a looseleaf binder on the work done during the morning — what was planted, how new plants are doing, what is blooming, and so on. It is a fascinating record. Reviewing it one learns that smog ruins daffodils, that the peacocks are the biggest problem — flying into the gloriosa daisies and nesting in the calendulas — and that watering is a problem because, first of all, two hoses have to be dragged out, the watering is practically all ground watering, which is time consuming — there is very little overhead watering — and the area, being partial adobe and never before planted, is hard to work and slow to absorb water. The railroad ties put in last fall by Frank Simerly, then superintendent and now an assistant director, helped to make watering easier.

The entries in the notebook reflect the progress of the garden and the cooperation with the staff. The Garden For All Seasons is totally maintained by the volunteers, but when help is sought it is given. An entry on June 29, 1973, reads: "Bill Neubauer (staff nurseryman) showed us how to plant seeds. *Helichrysum*, etc." The April 10 entry reads: "Removed one row of daffodil bulbs on path edge of plot N in order to

widen path to uniform width. Left one row of mixed gladiolus bulbs next to dianthus." And, later in the morning: "Started restaking with permanent 2" square stakes at corner of all beds. Obtained 100 48" stakes from shop and sledge-hammer to pound them in. Larry Geerer (staff grounds maintenance man) came to help install them. Pounding in the hard dirt broke and splintered the stakes, so Larry got a posthole digger. This was very slow work, and we only finished plots P., N., and O."

Asked why he works in the garden, George Jack said, "Of course, like all of us, I enjoy gardening. But I also enjoy the companionship — we have a very congenial group working here — and I'm retired and this keeps me in good shape." In how good a shape is illustrated by this partial entry of November 10: "Removed rocks and turned over soil in beds 1 and 2. Lots of rocks and hard clods to break up . . . Added 2 bails of peat moss to bed 1 and raked it in. Watered with rain-bird for 1 hour. **HARD WORK!**"

The ratio of flowers to vegetables in the Garden For All Seasons is about four to one. Harvesting the vegetables can be fun along with the care. An entry of last May 3rd reads: "Harvested 2 dozen big, round radishes from MB3." And on May 7th (workdays are Tuesday and Fridays): "Harvested beets which were 3-4" in diameter . . . vegetable garden full of slugs, renovated the soil, put snail bait . . . planted eggplant, 3 Mission Bell and 2 pepper plants."

Today, the Garden For All Seasons provides cut flowers for all Arboretum needs. More, it provides visitors with proof that nonprofessionals can grow a successful garden of flowers and vegetables throughout the year in Southern California. It has become a star educational attraction, an ornament to the Department and to all the dedicated volunteers who created and worked in it.





Dimond, Donald S. 1974. "Garden for all seasons." *Lasca leaves* 24, 81–84.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/130958>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/139917>

**Holding Institution**

Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter H. Raven Library

**Sponsored by**

Los Angeles Arboretum

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: The Arboretum Library at the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.