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A Year of Flowers

Craig Rattleff is a man on a mission — he wants something blooming in his yard all year long. The garden he shares with his wife, Sue, meets that goal beautifully with a cohesive design that works in any season.

By Helen Newling Lawson

Nowhere is Craig's vision more evident than in the flowerbed flanking his driveway, where an ever-changing display offers a seasonal bouquet to passersby.

Craig uses succession plantings to keep this area flowering at all times. Early spring bulbs give way to late spring


bloomers like *Dianthus* and lavender (*Lavendula* spp.). These give way to a host of summer perennials and foliage plants. By fall, *Chrysanthemum*, *Aster*, beautyberry (*Callicarpa* spp.), muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), and swamp sunflowers (*Helianthus angustifolius*) take center stage. In winter, he counts on the

structure of evergreens and perennial seed heads to create interest, enhanced by splashes of color from pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*), snapdragons (*Antirrhinum majus*), and Swiss chard.

He follows this formula for year-round blooms elsewhere in his garden, including in the facing border in his front

Flowers in all seasons: The look of this bed changes drastically throughout the year. The display begins in spring as tulips emerge with the perennial foliage.





By late spring, *Dianthus* is blooming in the “see-through” bed in front, and English lavender echoes the color of the Japanese maple in front of the house.

Garden Profile

The Japanese Garden provides a respite from the riot of color and a chance for Craig to indulge his passion for conifers.





Garden Profile

yard and the beds that flow around his large central back lawn.

But Craig relies on more than just flowers to make his yard enticing. He also loves Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) and conifers, and designed a Japanese garden to showcase some prized specimens. The curved beds are designed to slow visitors down and create the promise of more to see around every bend. He also reminds other gardeners, "Green is a color, and serves as a great backdrop for practically everything."

Little touches also show off Craig's humor and whimsy. A "grandchildren's garden" tucked behind the understated Japanese garden is populated with garden gnomes. A vintage metal bedstead frames a "flowerbed" with a quilt of bedding annuals. He answered a fellow gardener's challenge to grow edibles by placing squash plants among the flowers right along the sidewalk.

Right: As the weather warms, vibrant orange California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) and self-sown *Verbena bonariensis* brighten the bed, while spikes of dwarf *Yucca* and Mexican feather grass (*Nasella tenuissima*) wave in front.

Below left: By late June, soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*) and Monarda have taken the poppies' place.

Below right: In fall, *Chrysanthemum* 'Ryan Gainey' takes center stage, supported by swamp sunflower.





Top to bottom: Craig also creates color combinations with foliage and ornaments in this composition with yellow smokebush (*Cotinus coggygria*) and a glass ball.

The perennial border on the other side also goes through a seasonal transformation from blue iris and white *Viburnum* in spring ...

... to hot colors in summer, thanks to 'Paprika' yarrow (*Achillea millefolium* 'Paprika'), *Hibiscus* 'Lord Baltimore' and 'Kopper King', and daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), with a touch of cool blue from *Heliotrope* 'Azure Skies'.



For years, Craig used gardening as a "mental health" respite from a heavy schedule of business travel. He was inspired by his mother's perennial garden, but learned most of what he knew from books, magazines, and the internet. Now a Master Gardener Extension Volunteer in Forsyth County and a member of the Georgia Perennial Plant Association, he is able to take advantage of lectures and garden tours to add to his knowledge.

He had the luxury of creating this garden from the ground (or more accurately, red clay) up. Starting 16 years ago with just one cherry tree (*Prunus* spp.) and a dozen builder-installed foundation shrubs, he encircled his property with sweeping perennial beds. Craig and Sue appreciate the privacy these perimeter plantings give their suburban lot.

Once he had his framework in place and amended the soil well with compost, Craig took his time and made careful observations to allow the garden to evolve. Watching the sun and existing plantings helped him plan additions that would keep the blooms going. He also makes changes as plants outgrow their space or die back. He has learned to carefully read plant labels to reduce the amount of editing he has to do!

As his grandchildren/garden helpers have gotten too involved in sports to help with the 15-20 hours per week he spends on his garden, Craig says he is now "reflecting on the amount of maintenance hours I spend currently with an eye toward replacing fussier plants and reducing the number of bedding plants." 🌿



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