

Couple turn Coweta plantation into special place

By MARTHA TATE

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 08/14/08

I have a little book called "The Daily Relaxer." In it are all sorts of tricks to help you let go of stress and "refresh your spirit."



GEORGE TEDDER / Special
Flowers fill the border along the fence of the Tedders' vegetable garden, where peaches can also be found dangling within reach.



MARTHA TATE / Special
The Patience Garden, one of the many gardens Liz and George Tedder have cultivated at their Coweta County home, includes plants that were collected during the family's travels.

One of the chapters is called "Special Place." The authors encourage you to invent a beautiful place. The idea is that you picture yourself there when you need to escape, and then you'll feel peaceful and safe. My "special place" is really more of a daydream I'd like to make come true. It's a country garden with chickens and all kinds of rustic outbuildings, each with its own garden and a rose rambling over the roof. There's a scuppernong arbor like at my Great-Grandpa Reeves' house in Rico.

Gravel paths lead to a kitchen garden and to cutting gardens overflowing with peonies in spring and zinnias in summer. In my orchard, I can pluck a Golden Delicious apple in summer and pick daffodils there in early spring.

Last week, something very odd happened to me when I went to see Liz Tedder's garden in Coweta County (here's another garden I wrote about for this newspaper exactly 20 years ago). A rooster crowed as we walked along one of Liz's long, flower-filled borders. Then she picked a delicious, white-fleshed peach from a tree next to her vegetable garden fence.

All of a sudden, I realized that Liz is living in my special place — and it's even better than I could invent myself.

Liz, a native of Valdosta, has been gardening all of her life. For the past 25 years, she has created a series of gardens around an 1830s plantation house she and her husband, George, restored.

Today, there are some 30 garden areas on 21 acres. Liz, who describes herself as “intensely resourceful and frugal,” has propagated much of the plant material in the garden or obtained divisions from friends through the years.

When I asked how she keeps the gardens going, Liz says it is all due to mulch, something she firmly believes in.

“We recycle everything, every twig, every limb, even the weeds,” she said. “All year long we haul leaves from Coweta County and put them on the beds. If I see the level of mulch going down, we bring in more leaves and pile them on. The earthworms do the rest. It’s saved us during the drought.”

Liz’s gardens have appeared in numerous magazines and publications. An “open gate” tour of the garden will be held Oct. 11, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., to raise money to restore the historic Arnold family cemetery on the property. Information and directions can be found at www.oakgrovega.com. A \$10 donation is tax-deductible. You’ll find plenty of ideas for a “special place” or for a real garden.

Here are just a few highlights, taken from a map of the gardens:

- Antique Rose Border — 1997: Siberian iris, pink and lavender daylilies, nepeta, lamb’s ear, salvia, penstemons, daffodils and roses, roses, roses. Set around a carriage house that also serves as a bed-and-breakfast.
- Formal Garden — 1986: Where the Tedder children’s weddings took place. The year starts off with blue pansies; then come hundreds of white daffodils, many with pink- or peach-colored trumpets, ‘Elizabeth Arden’ tulips, blue camassia, love-in-a-mist, blue, white and peach bearded iris and white Japanese roof iris, white and purple phlox, Siberian iris, peonies, coral roses, purple hesperis, blue salvia.

- The Secret Garden — 1995: Planned for the granddaughters to have tea parties. ‘Bell Song’ daffodil, white rain lilies, red hurricane lilies, ‘Royal Standard’ hostas and white ‘Sister Theresa’ hydrangeas.

- The Playhouse Garden — Furnished with child-size antiques, the playhouse has its own garden of dwarf trees and shrubs.

- Herb Garden — The oldest garden here; the outer beds as well as the scuppernong arbor were put in around 1990. All plants are herbs or antique flowers. The granite sundial base was the foundation to the original outbuildings.

- Potager Gardens — Fruit trees, vegetables and flowers. A 50-foot-by-50-foot section is filled with rows of sweet-smelling tuberoses.

- Patience Garden — 1986: An old barn forms the backdrop for this garden surrounded by a stone fence. Miniature plants and new plants from the family’s travels are planted here to see how they fare in the Southern heat.

- Sunken Garden: Everything here blooms white, even the liriopse. Liz Tedder’s favorite white ‘Natchez’ crape myrtles provide shade and stunning bark in winter.

Martha Tate is a writer who lives in Atlanta.