

Garden Art

By Nancy Bliss

Gardens are works of art. You start with a few small plants or seeds, put them in decent soil, add water and sunshine and the results are a little miracle. There's nothing lovelier than homegrown tomatoes, squash blossoms or peas blooming. When you cannot keep up with all the squashes or homegrown tomatoes, it's a joy to go out and see what needs harvesting.

In addition to all that growth, there's nothing wrong with adding a little color, whimsy, or silliness to put a smile on your face. Here are a few ideas that might appeal to you, add a spark to your gardens next year and perhaps add some colorful practicality.

This year I constructed a squash ladder for my vining squashes (like acorn squash or Tromboncini—a zucchini-like squash shaped like a trumpet). I used two 2x2 stakes about four feet long per side, made into a ladder shape with horizontal bars about 16 inches apart. Repeat for the second half and paint bright red. (I love spray paint!) Tie the two sides together at the top and arrange over the squashes. As the squash fills out it is lovely, fun and easy to pick.

*file389467*Trellis green beans to hide the view. Our green beans camouflage our 5000-gallon water tank.

In our raised beds we planted a few sunflowers around the tomatoes and tomatillos. These grew eight to ten feet tall and made great supports for growing plants. The sunflower blooms were spectacular. The stalks, when dry, are strong enough for staking peas and other lighter plants.

My husband constructed a tomato cage from 3/4-inch PVC. It is sturdy, supports the larger tomato plants very well, and is reusable year after year. I took my spray paints and 'decorated' it with greens and yellows. (Note: for tomatoes avoid red paint. It's confusing when tomatoes start ripening!)

I have several 'gopher chasers,' those 'fans' that spin when the wind blows. I justify their usefulness by pretending they work. But who wants boring gray? I sprayed them with multiple colors to resemble flowers or dragons or whatever I imagine.

Planting randomly placed flowers amongst your vegetables is an easy color addition. Some, like marigolds, are insect deterrents. Zinnias and coreopsis are easy and add wonderful color, plus providing cut flowers for the home.

Both my husband and I collect rocks. Many plants benefit from having cool roots below a rock mulch and warm sunshine above. Rock also provides a protective barrier from dogs running over plants (people as well). They're beautiful and very low maintenance.

Painting a few ladybugs on the sides of your raised beds is fun as well. I purchased little metal ladybugs online and sprinkled them throughout my beds.

PVC pipe works very well for netting fruit trees to protect your fruit harvest from critters. It takes some patience to assemble them from year to year, trying to remember which ones were used for olallieberries or peaches or cherries. Ours are painted to coordinate with the fruit crop. Peaches are orange and yellow, berries are purple... you get the idea.

There are, of course, all sorts of ways to get creative and add a little layer of fun and fantasy to your gardens. When beds are dormant and things may be looking bleak, there are still spots of color and interest reminding you that a new season is right around the corner. When you think garden planning for the coming year, think whimsy.

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