

*MY SECRET GARDEN by Victoria Shipp*

I never intended to make a secret garden when we moved here, but over the years one has developed. It's along the west side of our back garden by our neighbor's wooden fence, draped in honeysuckle as the backdrop. It's nothing fancy, one doesn't have to enter through a small, ancient wooden door set in a crumbling wall or a beaten up pagoda hanging with wisteria; but it's a beautiful cool, earthy-smelling, shady place to escape to in the heat of a summer's afternoon with dappled sunlight coming in through the trees. To me, it's a particularly special haven.

Laying at rest are our first-born furry children, Maggie and Nigel, brother and sister. Maggie became a cat angel at 13 and Nigel age 17, two months ago. I bought some mauve pansies, my favorite color, to plant around Nigel's stone and most survived the cold snap in March.

On a weekday, there is silence with only the birds to keep me company with their different chirps and calls and the occasional screeching hawk as she passes through the trees. The many types of bees are busy gathering their pollen and I never feel threatened by them, I have my world to myself. Occasionally, I see a tiny tree frog jumping around exploring different hideouts.

I can't say I spent a fortune with the plants, many of which came from "Caroline's Garden", who I'm sure many of you knew. Her gardens were a joy to visit, she had so many interesting plants. I just came across a marker buried in the soil underneath an Oak Leaf Hydrangea – seven dollars!

So, would you like to take a stroll around the garden with me?

The pink climbing rose that covers part of the fence is called Zephirine Drouhin. One can smell the wonderful fragrance a few feet away, and it is quite intoxicating.



The shrubs, Leptodermis, are from Caroline's and were just a couple of sticks when I planted them. They have small, dainty lilac flowers for most of the



summer months and are covered with bees.

The ground cover is Evening Primrose which has a vibrant yellow flower for a few weeks in May; next to that is a Witch Hazel that has lovely yellow catkin-type flowers and beautiful chartreuse leaves.

Here to the right are where my long-time friends, Maggie and Nigel, rest.



Impatients grow very well in this area and I usually plant some white ones here and there. One of my favorite heucheras that I purchased from Caroline is Autumn Bride that has a foot-long stem of white, dainty flowers in the summer. Lambs' Ears and Bergenia are dotted around too.

I planted all of the Hostas in wire cages to prevent the voles from chewing the succulent roots, which works well and is worth the upfront effort to do so.



To the left is a Weigelia, called Wine and Roses, just coming into bud and in the foreground a pink Spirea.



Just past the Weigelia is a Beauty Bush with the amazing purple berries in the early fall that the birds adore.



Just in front of "Autumn", one of the concrete statues we have representing the four seasons that watches over each corner of the garden, is this lovely blue Enchantress Hydrangea.



Planted around "Autumn" are two Gardenia Jasminoides. The white flowers in late spring are very fragrant. This is typically a difficult shrub to grow but because

this year was a mild winter, they have survived well and I think they love the location. The Astilbe do well in semi-shade and the plants have gotten huge. There is one Elephant Ear which will be poking it's nose out soon to the right of Autumn – such a dramatic exotic plant. Clematis Killian Donahue, is (behind "Autumn") climbing up the rustic metal structure, and there are more Hostas. There are hundreds of different types of Hosta and they produce stalks of delicate, trumpet-shaped flowers in shades of white and purple in the summer, and come in all leaf shapes and sizes.



I hope you've enjoyed your stroll in my secret garden, come visit any time, I'd love to see you.