

## A secret garden: Framingham friends share tasks in a horticultural hideaway

By E.T. Robbins / News Correspondent

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**F**RAMINGHAM — Joe Margie Munro's T-shirt says it best: "A garden is a thing of beauty and a job forever."

Her bright smile and smooth skin disguise her 79 years. Hailing from Texas, Munro's Southern drawl remains intact. Her friend Earl Burgess, who'll be 80 this Christmas, is a trim, handsome man.

The octogenarians-in-waiting have been tending a garden together for two decades at Burgess' Cochituate Road home. Burgess started the garden in the late 1960s when he decided to give his daughter a lesson in raising vegetables.

From the street, you don't see much. A small plot with black-eyed Susans and gazing balls sits to the right of the driveway. A faux frog produces croaking sounds from the stoop. A wall of shrubs and trees make up the modest back yard. Nice, you might think, but what's the big deal?

That's the secret. The wall of foliage camouflages nearly 400 feet of vegetable and flower gardens. Munro, who lives down the road, recalls when she first became involved.

"I asked him 'Can I come work in your garden?' We were both divorced and in an organization called Parents without Partners. That's how I knew him. We were just friends."

The two have remained friends, although they slyly admit to being regular dance partners as well. Burgess, a man of few words, let Munro explain how they split the work.

"I'm the weeder. I just love to. Of course we both plant. He tills. He does all the heavy work. We had 60 tomato plants and he staked every one of them."

Despite this fact, Burgess doesn't eat raw tomatoes.

"In the summertime I buy the cans two for a buck at Market Basket when we got fresh ones out there," he said, laughing. "I don't want to cook when I come in."

Munro rattled off a list of the vegetables in the garden: carrots, beets, squash, Swiss chard, green beans, peppers, lettuce and cucumbers.

"You've got melons too," Burgess interjects.

Munro nodded. "We've been trying to grow watermelons. They're running, but we haven't seen a bloom on them yet so we don't know. We have two fig trees, but they don't get figs. We have two peach trees and two plum trees."

"Apple," Burgess reminds her.

"Oh, I forgot the two apple trees. We have black-eyed Susans more than anything else. We're going to have a balloon flower. We have three hibiscus plants. We have dahlias," Munro said.

"White eyed daisies," Burgess added. "We have a garden that's just for hummingbirds. It's about 25-by-15 (feet)."

Their one disappointment? "We haven't got any hummingbirds," Munro said. "We don't know if we just miss them or what."

Burgess and Munro both grew up on farms. Munro recalled her childhood.

"We raised cotton and peanuts and that kind of stuff. It's odd because as a kid, I can remember (saying) 'Oh, God, we got to go hoe the beans and the corn and pick cotton.' But I love it. I really do."

Munro admitted that working in a garden — any garden — is her passion.

"My girls at first didn't really like gardening, but now they love it. Like yesterday; my daughter lives in Sutton, and it was her birthday. She called me up, and she said 'Mom, you know what I want to do for my birthday? I want you to come out and for us to work in the garden.' And that's what we did."

While Munro heads to the hummingbird garden, Burgess gazes at the rows of vegetables. His eyes are far away, lost in 79 years of memories.

"It looks like the country. It's nice and quiet out there."

*This is another in our summer series profiling local residents who love to garden. If you know someone with a green thumb who has a story to tell, let us know by calling features editor Nancy Olesin at 508-626-4446 or by e-mail at [nolesin@cnc.com](mailto:nolesin@cnc.com).*