

## FEATURED GARDEN

by Cathie Lank



The People's Choice Award 2010

For Dave and Barbara Breckon, winners of Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Competition 2010 People's Choice Award, gardening started out as a necessity, not a desire. In order to tame the steep hillside behind their house they decided to terrace the slope with slate walls. This had the wonderful effect of providing flowerbeds on multiple levels.

"We weren't big gardeners before, but when we bought this house we needed a retaining wall, and I knew I wanted a pond, so we built from there," said Dave. "We did the garden in small stages building gazebos, cobblestone walks, stone walls and garden beds. It took us about seven to eight years to bring it to where it is now."

"After that it was just a matter of changing the plants according to what I wanted at the time," smiled Barbara. "As time goes by you get favourites and so you go from there, keeping the favourites and experimenting with new plants every year."

And experiment they have. The garden is filled with vibrant colours that invite visitors to come and inspect more closely. An amazing collection of lilies stands out immediately, and dotted among them are roses, gentians, poppies and peonies, surrounded by various textures and shades of green. Dave and Barbara didn't have a specific theme in mind when they built the garden so they describe it as a garden with 'a little bit of everything'.

"We love experimenting," said Barbara. "I think that's why we ended up with many different micro-areas: cobblestone walkways, slate walls, columnar and specialty trees, alpins, pond and grasses. It's a very full garden."

Dave's pond sits in the centre of the garden inviting visitors to come and relax on the small bench and listen to the soothing sound of gurgling water. Koi fish swim lazily about under the shade of irises, water lilies and other water plants. The pond and garden have been very big wildlife magnets, providing some challenges along the way. Dave once found a raccoon swimming



## DAVE & BARBARA BRECKON

in the pond. Worried about the fish, he headed out quickly to find that they were fine; the raccoon had just wanted a refreshing swim, it seemed. Another time he arrived a little too late when he saw a wading heron. It had eaten most of the Koi in a very short time. Who knew a heron could eat so much in one sitting! Deer, porcupines, snakes, pheasants and pocket gophers have all been spotted along with many bird species, including Pilcated woodpeckers and a Baltimore oriole.

"We get ducks visiting the pond, too," said Dave. "One duck even came back for about eight years. Every spring she would wait patiently near the pond as I took the cover off and got it ready for summer. Once the water was in she would make herself at home there and would sometimes bring her babies to visit."

The only gardening advice the Breckons offer is to pay attention to the zoning when choosing plants. Barbara has found that even going by the instructions on the plants doesn't always ensure success. Important factors often overlooked are soil type, Chinooks and

whether or not there are plant-gobbling porcupines and rabbits in the neighbourhood.

As well as winning the People's Choice Award, the Breckons also won first in Perennial Garden, second in Plant Lover's Garden and third in Water Garden and Large Garden. They had entered the competition several years ago so both were quite surprised when, after taking a few years off, they found over 1,200 people coming through to visit the garden! The large numbers of visitors is a real testament to how popular the Garden Competition is. They encourage others to enter their gardens.

"There are so many incredible gardeners out there," said Dave. "Don't think you have to have a lot of expertise to enter the competition. We're amateurs. People don't realize what gardening talent they have."

"We felt it was worth it because you meet so many nice people and learn a lot," said Barbara. "People share what they know about gardening and you often learn great tips from them."

