

FEATURED GARDEN *by Cathie Lank*

When Arlene Macdonald decided to retire after 21 years of operating her own décor and gift store, she already had plans – and sitting around watching the days go by wasn't one of them. She had always wanted to garden and now she had time to do it!

In 2000 Arlene and her husband had purchased a house in Douglas Glen and after retiring in 2005, she immediately started work on redesigning her backyard.

"In 2005 I worked hard to make the beds in the backyard bigger. We did the Allan Blocks and once that was done I got busy planting," said Arlene. "The first plants were ones I had brought from our house in Sylvan Lake before we sold it. I dug out monkshood, ostrich ferns, elephant ears and iris bulbs and brought them to plant in the backyard as well as my favorite rocks and driftwood, much to the grumbling of my husband and son-in-law."

When Arlene and her husband held a Canada Day party in their backyard in 2007 Arlene was surprised when not one but several guests told her she should enter her garden in the Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Competition. After looking into it, she decided to enter.

"I just made the deadline and entered in everything I think," said Arlene. "I was lucky enough to receive first place in Novice Open Mid-Size Garden and second in Pots and Containers. I really learned a lot from the comments and suggestions made by the different judges and tried very hard to implement them in the garden wherever possible."

The following year, Arlene entered in three categories

winning first place for Pots and Containers and second for Open Mid-Size Garden and Outdoor Living. Once again she learned from the comments made by the judges and made more changes making the garden look that much better.

"In 2009 I only entered two categories and won first place in both: Open Mid-Size Garden and Outdoor Living," said Arlene. "There were hardly any comments or suggestions last year except that I should have entered my containers in the competition."



The garden has a Zen-like feel and is an eclectic mix of flowers, shrubs, trees, a Buddha's pagoda and fountain. Arlene mentions she has had many visitors tell her they sense a feeling of calm and well-being in the garden. On a beautiful summer

ARLENE MACDONALD

afternoon or evening, with the whisper of Zen music in the background and the soft gurgling of the water fountain, Arlene believes you find peace and tranquility here.

Some of Arlene's favourite plants are astilbe, monkshood, irises and a beautiful columnar Colorado blue spruce, a striking feature greeting visitors when they enter the garden. Arlene doesn't have a favourite corner in the garden but rather a series of favourite areas depending on what she's worked on that day; the area that looks fresh and cared for is the hit of the day.

"I don't have any inspirational story as to why I like to garden, I just do. I like digging in the dirt and

weeding and I love the smell of the soil," she said. "I also talk to my garden and my many neighbours will attest to that!"

One of Arlene's major challenges is the wind that comes off a parkway adjacent to the Bow River and funnels into her backyard. This year the wind was so bad they had to tie everything in the garden down. Another challenge Arlene points out is that there are not enough hours in a day to garden – most gardeners would agree.

"I have not had any professional training in the garden but I think that my years of merchandising and displaying in the store taught me a sense of colour, shape and dimension," said Arlene. "You get to learn what looks good and what doesn't."

If Zen means enlightenment then perhaps Arlene has achieved it in both gardening and retirement.

