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Sometimes nature needs help in decoating a garden, and Jessie Gwidt will share bright ideas on how to do that at the Port Garden Club seminar

Almost anything Jessie Gwidt finds in her Port Washington home, at second-hand shops or rummage sales could end up in her garden.

Gwidt has a knack for taking something about to be discarded and figuring out a fun way to use it in the garden.

With the mild winter giving everyone spring fever, now is a good time to create some art that will bring pizzazz to the garden before plants grow, she said.

Gwidt will present “Artful Ideas to Decorate Your Gardens” at the Port Washington Garden Club’s Green Up Your Winter Blues gardening seminar on Saturday, Feb. 18, in the auditorium of the Ozaukee County Administration Center, 121 W. Main St., Port Washington.

Those who attend her program will receive a 50 to 75-page booklet with pictures of garden

art ideas and instructions. Gwidt will also include sources for the ideas.

"I'm going to let them know how easy this really is and how they can grow some garden art in their garden to show their personality and add a little color," Gwidt said.
"You can use stuff around your house that you might think you don't need anymore or buy items for 25 to 50 cents."

Gwidt, who is treasurer of the garden club, had barely planted a flower until seven years ago when she married her husband Kevin and moved into the house he bought in 1999.

The back yard was filled with old car parts. The front yard had two overgrown pine trees, a crabby old crab-apple tree and a few evergreen bushes.

It was not pretty, Gwidt said.

"I started making flower beds, but my personality wasn't in the gardens," she said. "I just wanted something fun that would be a conversation piece if we're with friends enjoying a meal or just sitting on the patio."

Gwidt visited garden centers and craft fairs, went on-line and to the library to get ideas for sparking up her garden.

She soon was making flowers out of glass dishes stuck on metal rods, hanging window frames from the pergola she built along the garage and making concrete leaf castings for bird baths.

Plates were woven through the spokes of an old bicycle wheel then hung in a tree. It's a good way to showcase favorite pieces of grandmother's china that's chipped but has sentimental value, Gwidt said.

She also makes glass totems by gluing plates, cups, bowls, vases and saucers on top of one another. The piece is then put on a metal rod or can sit on a table or in the garden.

For spring, Gwidt glues artificial flowers on twigs, then puts them in a pretty vase or flower pot. A few plastic or real dyed eggs can be placed around the base for an Easter centerpiece.

Gwidt recently found a 1964 bicycle that she attached to the front picket fence. For winter, she filled the basket with evergreens and berries. Soon, artificial flowers, then real ones will bloom in the basket.

When Kevin saw the bicycle, he immediately thought of his grandmother.

"It's the same bicycle my grandmother rode from the house to the barn every day to milk the cows," Kevin said.

The picket fence provides interest and privacy for the front entrance, which is filled with

perennial and annual flowers that provide a beautiful, continuous display through fall.

It took hard work to get the gardens established, Kevin said.

In one day, he chopped down the pine and crab-apple trees and pulled out the evergreen bushes.

When Gwidt came home that night, she found an empty yard with upturned dirt.

It was a blank canvas for her dream garden, she said.

Another time, Kevin came home and found his wife building a pergola.

“I was told to hold the last piece of lumber as she screwed it in place,” Kevin said. “She is incredible.”

The house, which is along the Ozaukee Interurban Trail, didn’t have a fence around the yard when Kevin bought it. People on the path used to come into the yard to pet their golden retriever named Casey.

Kevin and his father erected a wood fence that’s six feet high along the driveway and bike path, but tapers to four feet next to their neighbor.

“We needed it so we could let the dog out to play, and it gave me a backdrop for my gardens,” Gwidt said.

It also provides an ideal place for their 4-year-old daughter Sarah to play.

One of the first areas Gwidt developed was a memory garden in the southwest corner of the back yard. An archway is covered with hop vines that are interesting even in winter. There is a bench for reflecting or reading, a butterfly plaque and angel statues for her mother and other relatives who have died.

The hops, which provide privacy when lush with flowers, are always a conversation starter,

Gwidt said.

“Anyone who wants the hops for making beer is welcome to them, but they can’t have the plants,” she said. “I love the plants and flowers. This year, it will be even more lush because I added another plant on the other side of the arbor.”

When Sarah was a toddler, she and her parents planted a vegetable and flower garden for her to dig in whenever she wants.

“The thing I’m most proud of is the watering-can fountain in Sarah’s garden,” Gwidt said.

She dug the hole, put in a plastic liner and added a pump so water flows from the spout into a small pond and recirculates. Sarah can water her garden from the fountain.

Gwidt’s next project is to move Sarah’s play set behind the garage and create gardens along the back and side fences to encircle the yard in flowers.

A favorite place to sit when the weather is nice is on the patio under the pergola surrounded by plants and art pieces. Clematis and other vines climb on plastic screening attached to the pergola on either side of the window pane, creating a garden room.

“It’s our favorite place to have coffee in the morning or to sit and read,” Gwidt said.

“People ask if I had the money, would I redo the entire yard so it looks like one of those in garden magazines? What would I do? I’m not the type to just sit and enjoy it. I have to be doing something.”

Image Info: Jessie Gwidt looked through an old window frame hanging from a pergola she built. Clematis and other flowering vines grow around the frame. Photo by Sam Arendt