

Welcome to my garden

By **Margret McGilvray**/ Correspondent

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Article and photograph courtesy of the Sharon Advocate

When Sharon resident Kathy Tunsley arrived here from England 16 years ago, geographical challenges arose. A brutal winter, followed by a late spring, on the heels of an unbearable summer, and lack of water forced her to change her gardening concepts.

Now, as creator of the landscape design company Viburnum, she is wise to the ways of New England and practices her craft with the earth in mind.

"As I've gotten older, I've become more conscious," said Tunsley. "You start to worry about the effect everything has on the environment. I'm not a completely organic gardener. It would be hard to do everything organically. But I try to reduce the number of herbicides and pesticides I use."

Tunsley volunteered at the Mass Audubon Society shortly after her arrival and before working full time for the British Consulate. As a member of the Sharon Garden Club, she created an educational display on xeriscaping (low-water gardening) and lawn alternatives.

"We all need to get away from bright green grass," she said. "It's not environmentally friendly. In this part of the world where we don't have the water systems, we're not going to get lush green grass. Instead, we can learn to grow larger flower beds, and use plants that are drought resistant."

For Tunsley, gardening means movement and change.

What works beautifully one year comes out differently the next. "When I first got here, I thought I'd have a nice rose garden, like you have in England," she said. "But between the Japanese beetles and dead heading every night, it was too much work. So out went the roses!"

Another source of frustration was that old pesky dirt dweller, the groundhog.

"Groundhogs? I had never seen a groundhog in my life!" Tunsley said. "They ate everything in sight!"

Sherry Schmidt, a long time friend of Tunsley, has enjoyed the beautiful gardens for years.

"Entering Kathy's yard gives one the feeling of being transported to a more exotic locale," Schmidt said. "The peace and tranquility these gardens evoke provide a respite from everyday life."

Schmidt, whose children used to play at the edge of Tunsley's fish pond when they were toddlers, said there is always something new to see in Tunsley's yard.

"She has transformed her ordinary suburban lot into a work of art," Schmidt said. "The varied gardens, which encompass virtually the entire lot, run seamlessly together. It's a continuously evolving landscape."

Tunsley's gardens bring a sense of balance as well. She creates beds of ferns, shrubs, flowers, and has designed her own Pergula with medicinal and culinary herbs planted beneath it. A fountain and fish pond bring water to the landscape, and a boardwalk in the woods, built by her husband Roger, brings that woodsy new England feel into her own back yard.

For colors, Tunsley prefers to work with lilacs, blues, and pinks instead of reds, as the reds tend to clash. She also uses yellows to enhance the visual sensation.

"I like to attract insects and butterflies," Tunsley said. "It's really good for the yard. I encourage the birds and the bees to come to the garden and create their own little ecosystem."

When Tunsley was a child, her father grew vegetables to supplement the family income and to provide the family with vegetables year round. Her mother helped when he became sick. As an adult, Tunsley uses gardening to take edge off of working those long hour days.

"Gardening is very relaxing. It takes the stress out of your day. You get down to nature. I work in an office all day. After commuting from Cambridge, the first thing I do is get into my old clothes and start gardening. Its enormously therapeutic."

But concerns for the earth still linger.

"I do worry about the damage our generation is doing to this earth and the legacy we are leaving our grandchildren," Tunsley said. "It needs to be tackled at government level through agreements with other countries. One of my major concerns is global warming, and the earth's dependency on oil. The government should be spending more resources on promoting alternative energy supplies."

Through Viburnum, however, Tunsley has found a way to put her beliefs into practice.



"I like to custom design client's sites and make them both functional and attractive. I like to help people understand the right plants to use to reduce their dependency on water, and encourage them to think about a more environmentally friendly ratio between grass areas and planting beds."

If you would like more information on Kathy Tunsley's Viburnum Landscape Design, visit her Web site at www.viburnumdesign.com, or call 781-784-7955.