

Master Gardener For the Winter Season

By Ann Marie Caldwell



For Terry Glaser, our Master Gardener for the Winter Season, gardening is more than a means of turning nature from its disordered state into one of order, beauty, and productivity. For Terry, it is akin to a spiritual renewal whereby he has found solace from the harsh realities of the world in which we live. Just as the natural cycle of life moves from the dead of winter into the rebirth of spring, so too the human person can move from emotional deadness into the rebirth of hope and renewed life.

Terry had a garden off and on as he traveled around the world, first, with his military family and then during his own military career. This off and

on gardening pattern persisted during his civilian years while working as an IT professional for various companies, including USAA and Valero, and finally with a local Healthcare company, for whom he served as IT Director. During those years, gardening was just something he did in his spare time along with other hobbies and pastimes. That was the case until his wife Shelley was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. Terry quit his IT job to care for her and began to bury his grief in the soil of his own front yard. His goal was to turn his yard into a pollinator garden for butterflies and a sanctuary for birds and other wildlife. Terry was so successful with this project that a friend suggested that he join her in taking last year's Master Gardener training. It was his involvement with the Master Gardeners and with the transformation of his own yard that enabled him to endure the penetrating grief of losing his wife while he was still taking the Master Gardener class.

Experiencing the joy and beauty of nature while observing, at the same time, its life and death cycles helped Terry to understand and accept that these same timeless cycles are also part of the human condition. In addition to the solace he experienced working in his own garden, Terry also found himself soothed and his own life reaffirmed at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens, of which he is a member. He calls these gardens his Zen Retreat. There, he allows the calming forces of nature to penetrate his being and to nurture and heal his soul.

Terry also finds that his spirits are uplifted when he works as a docent in the Edible Gardens at SABOT. He first began working there as a trained volunteer, and now he serves as an unofficial helper, greeting visitors, chatting with them about the plants, and answering their questions. Gardening is a topic that allows Terry to have an instant rapport with the many visitors from around the world who still come, despite COVID-19 restrictions, to enjoy the natural beauty of our wonderful gardens. Reaching out and interacting with others is another way to avoid the depression that can come from being self-absorbed by personal grief as it focuses one's attention outward into the invigorating world of other human beings. For Terry, sharing his love of gardening is a natural way to begin the process of reaching out to others.

Terry also interacts with others in a digital way. He monitors the Master Gardener Facebook page, looking at comments, redirecting questions to Hotline volunteers, and, occasionally, posting an article there as well. Additionally, Terry uses this time of forced isolation to take online courses about

gardening and to use the vast digital network to explore other areas of interest. He reports of a recent virtual trip to the New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art, a fascinating adventure that he was able to do from the comfort of his own home.

Before the coronavirus struck, Terry worked with the Children's Garden at SABOT and, of course, with the rodeo. Presently, he sometimes gets up and about in time to help out with the new Greenies Urban Farm. He is also a member of the Native Plant Society. It is from the expertise of its members that Terry has gleaned much of the information about native plants which he used to create in his own wildlife landscape.

For Terry, the last year has not been easy. The pain of losing his wife was followed by that of losing one of his two beloved Golden Retrievers. But Terry is resilient and has used his love of gardening as a way to buffet the trials that have come his way. He has learned to be patient and to let plants talk to him about their secret needs, and, in turn, to learn from them some of his own. He has learned that you cannot force a plant to do what it was not meant to do, nor can you force yourself to bury parts of your life that are painful. He now sees life as a spiritual adventure with both challenges and rewards. He now knows that if you take care of nature it will take care of you.