

Have you ever wished you could turn your gardening habit into a viable business? Marsh, Jennifer and Lacey Menne did just that. The Menne family in Kingston produces the most incredible floriferously splendid bouquets. The best part is that the gorgeous arrangements are available for the bargain price of ten dollars. A recent bouquet combined stems of deepest purple buddleia, orange and yellow crocosmia, pink and peach gladiola, blue phacelia and dahlias and zinnias in several shades.

We have a “hobby that went wild” said Jennifer and Marsh. Jennifer works for the NK School District and Marsh has a home-run lumber estimating business. Lacey is a student at University of Washington and the money she earns from the bouquets is helping fund her education. Lacey’s brother Marshall helped in the garden too and ten years ago he and his wife Anna were married there.

Mennes constructed their gardens on cleared pastureland. Two times a year they enrich their soil with washed dairy manure from Sequim. Jennifer said, “It’s the same manure they use at Heronswood.” Marsh said “We used over sixty yards of the manure when we were moving the gardens around recently. Mennes feel the flowers are the very best in August through October when the beds are full of zinnias and sunflowers. Jennifer was a master gardener for four years and coordinated the master gardener clinics at the Kingston Farmers Market. She also worked at Heronswood.

Spencer Tweten a student at Kingston Junior High is their full time helper this year. Marsh and Spencer dig, weed and deadhead. Spencer has taken classes at Heronswood from Dan Hinkley. Marsh says Jennifer decides the layout of the flowerbeds and he and Spencer do the digging, planting and moving. Like all gardeners “we move things around all the time,” said Jennifer who works side by side with Marsh and Spencer, explaining that the students who’ve worked for them over the years discover that they either “like plants or not.”

The gardens border woods. Mennes showed me where Bambi and his friends had been munching and nibbling. Marsh said, “We had roses and berries but we’ve taken them all out. And we’ve put fences around the apple trees. The deer were here first and we try to garden around them.” Jennifer said, “The deer love the ten and twelve dollar Heronswood hardy geraniums and don’t bother with the six and eight dollar ones.” Marsh jokingly called the deer “long legged rats.” Jennifer added that they ate her Mother’s Day gift, a pink dogwood. They also love *Viburnum carlesii*. “Fortunately for us the deer avoid sunflowers and zinnias,” they added. “But they adore *godetia* and *statis*. Our deer are very picky,” Marsh said.

Marsh’s favorite flowers are the annuals. Mennes order seeds from eleven different suppliers. “Spencer planted all our seeds,” said Jennifer. Marsh said his favorite thing to do is deadhead the Bachelor Buttons. He deadheads them every day. These multi-colored and delightfully textured flowers bloom for three months if deadheaded consistently. Marsh especially enjoys thinning out the plants. Jennifer and Marsh added that their friends rescue discarded seedlings, giving them homes in their gardens.

I’m always curious about watering, soil composition and fertilizing. Jennifer and Marsh explained that they once fertilized religiously with fish fertilizer one week and miracle grow the next. But now they’ve found that all the flowers really need is manure in spring and fall. Their soil is sandy and drains well. Beds are watered twice a week. During July and August beds are watered in early morning and early evening several times a week.

Jennifer offered tips for prolonging the life of cut flower bouquets. Be sure everything used is really clean. Put cut flowers in water immediately. I noticed bronze fennel and asked for a tip because my cut fennel sheds pollen and sometimes wilts. Jennifer said cut the fennel a day before you’ll put it in a bouquet. Immediately place the stems in water and let them soak up the water for a day. Then shake off the pollen, cut the stem again and put in water in a bouquet with other flowers.

Mennes are paring their business down. Through the years they’ve supplied flowers and bouquets for weddings, florists and the Kingston Farmers Market. Now it’s definitely becoming a hobby. “We used to cut 10,000 flowers each month for two to three months every summer. We’re paring back and want to relax more,” they said. Jennifer and Marsh hope Lacey, Spencer and their predecessors will continue with the garden and make up the bouquets to earn money for college. Mennes want to “have fun weeding, deadheading, planning and planting,” and the kids can cut, combine and sell the bouquets for years to come.

You can email comments to Peg Tillery at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.