



**“Earthy Delights” by Joyce Glasner
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In rural Nova Scotia, a keen gardener displays her abiding talents in a swath of perennial bloom, nurtured with care and affection.

“Another Findhorn” is how Gail Logan describes her luxuriant garden on Nova Scotia’s south shore. Indeed, in this rocky coastal environment, where wind-sculpted conifers dominate the landscape, it’s unusual to find such an extraordinary garden. But it isn’t until Gail explains that it took three years to transform what had been a derelict farmyard into this enchanting haven that the connection to the legendary Scottish garden becomes clear. Like Findhorn, where roses are said to bloom in the snow and vegetables grow to gigantic proportions in the harshest conditions, Gail’s meandering country garden, next to her commercial One Sky Now Gallery and Garden Centre, also seems to possess magical properties. The lavish beds brim with perennials, ornamental grasses and a variety of rare and unusual species. Bees buzz contentedly from blossom to blossom, and dragonflies flit around the pond. Eight-foot castor bean plants and ten-foot sunflowers vie for attention, and the heavenly scent of roses and lavender wafts on the breeze.

Gail and her partner, Mary Haylock, bought the dilapidated farm, situated a few kilometres outside of the picturesque town of Mahone Bay, in 1998. When Gail told her children she planned to open an organic garden centre on the property, they were more than a little sceptical. “They thought I’d gone mad,” she laughs. “But I reminded them of Findhorn and the fact that it, too, had been built on a garbage dump.”

Before she could even think of starting a garden, however, Gail faced the monumental challenge of cleaning up the property, a job that took three months to complete. Once the three industrial-sized dumpsters of rubbish had been carted away, the first beds were mapped out and the soil fortified with plenty of compost, manure and bone meal. The half-acre of land between the gallery and the house became the perennial garden. Meanwhile, plots for vegetables, asparagus, raspberries and plant propagation were laid out in the back fields.

Gail, who is a self-taught sculptor as well as a landscape designer, says she didn’t have any particular vision or plan in mind when she started the perennial garden. Her only desire was to create a harmonious place filled with creative energy. As you wander along paths that wind around lavish beds, it soon become apparent that she has accomplished exactly what she set out to do. The garden is truly a work of art. There is nothing formal or linear about the design. One section flows naturally into the next, with each area offering the viewer something different and delightful. Artfully arranged sculptures, ornaments, and arbours add interesting focal points to the beds. And comfortable driftwood furnishings invite lounging around the pond at the centre of the garden, where several large koi swim contentedly among water hyacinth, water lilies, iris and cattails. Koi aren’t the only contented creatures on the farm. On fact, Gail and Mary have a whole menagerie of pets including two dogs, four cats, a small herd of African pigmy goats, a quarter horse, and Gail’s favourites: a pair of donkeys named Sugar and Shalom.

Gail's artistic sensibility and love of colour are evident throughout the garden. She uses contrasts in colour, size and texture to make a visual impact. A patch of rich blue butterfly delphiniums, for example, makes a striking counterpoint to a swath of bright yellow coreopsis in one bed, as do the splashes of crimson poppies among a drift of white musk mallow in another. But it's her passion the rare and unusual that really raises Gail's garden above the average. Japanese bottle gourd, brugmansia, teasel and silly bum cactus are just a few of the unique plants interspersed among the coreopsis, roses, lilies, irises and delphiniums. Searching out these rarities, she confesses, is part of the attraction. But she also loves the element of surprise they bring to the garden. "I'm not satisfied with little plantings all in a row," she says. "There's always something crazy and bizarre here." The Japanese bottle gourd that winds down a tree and cascades across the pond was one of Gail's first exotic finds. Its profusion of velvety soft leaves, delicate white blossoms and bottle-necked gourds makes it a spectacular addition to the garden. As is the burgmansia, with its stunning, white trumpet-shaped flowers, and the teasel—a towering, bristly-headed plant used to brush up the nap on cloth in bygone eras.

Gail's garden is constantly growing and evolving. One of the latest additions is a "meditation garden" which is situated in a grove of birch and poplar behind the greenhouse. Visitors are drawn to this cool, tranquil area with its throne-like driftwood chair in which to sit and contemplate the surrounding beauty as the soothing, earthy sounds of rustling poplar leaves, bleating goats and splashing water wash over you. Statues of Buddha and St. Francis, as well as one of Gail's works in progress—an intriguing hanging sculpture made of rusted metal hoops which she found by the side of the road one day—complete the garden.

Beyond the meditation garden is a large pond where Gail raises aquatic plants. The pond also doubles as a swimming hole, which Gail and Mary's seven grandchildren flock to during the summer.

At the root of her luxuriant garden is Gail's reverence for the land and a desire to promote balance and harmony in her environment. All the beds are fertilized with organic compost and manure (from the animals on the farm). The asparagus, raspberries and propagated plants are all mulched with eel grass and seaweed to keep the weeds down. The seaweed mulch apparently does more than just discourage weeds. "The old-timers around here always claimed that the seaweed made the asparagus sweet," Gail says. "And they were right. I've never tasted asparagus as good as this." In addition to using organic fertilizer and mulches, she also utilizes companion planting, rather than pesticides, to control pests. All the pots and containers used in the garden centre are recycled, and in winter, rather than having a secondary heat source in the greenhouse, the plants are packed in sawdust to protect them from the cold. All this adds up to good stewardship, of which Gail is rightfully proud. "Looking back over the past decade," she says, "one of the things I'm really pleased about is the fact that Mary and I have been good stewards. We haven't done any harm."

From the moment Gail and Mary first set foot on the farm, they sensed there was something special about it. “I would drop a seed and it would grow. I didn’t have to do anything,” Gail recalls. One day shortly after moving in she was cleaning out the birdfeeder when some chicory seed spilled out onto the ground. The next thing she knew, she had a patch of chicory plants growing next to the feeder. She jokes that perhaps she’s not a very good gardener at all; that maybe the earth here is so fertile no human intervention is required to make things blossom. “It’s just taking me along for the ride,” she laughs, adding, “There’s a lot of good karma here, it’s just a wonderful, sweet, spiritual place to be.”