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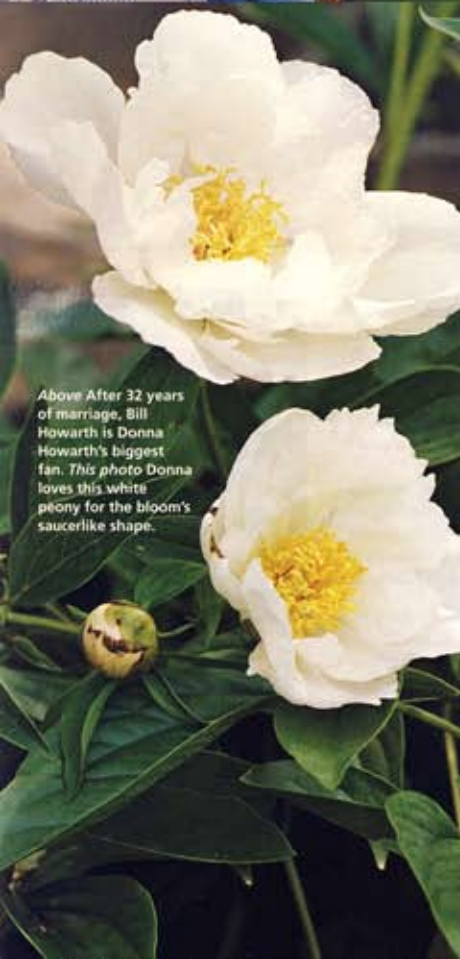
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by Ann Wilson
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field editor Megan Chaffin



Above After 32 years of marriage, Bill Howarth is Donna Howarth's biggest fan. This photo Donna loves this white peony for the bloom's saucerlike shape.



This photo A pair of sheep, two goats, and a flock of chickens call the Howarth's barn home. Donna surrounded the barn with colorful planting beds.

The Land of Promise

For Donna Howarth, gardening is a way to nourish body and soul.



garden at a glance

ZONE 5

SIZE Garden takes 1 acre of the 5-acre property, and includes a patio, pool, barn, and borders.

AGE Vegetable garden is seven years old, perennial borders are about five years old.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS Pulled out a parking-lot-size driveway and paddock fences to make way for the pool and gardens.

Opposite Extra-wide stone steps ascend from the barn to the pergola-capped patio. Siberian iris (*Iris siberica* 'Caesar's Brother'), peonies, assorted daylilies, *Nepeta* 'Blue Wonder', and spiked speedwell edge the walkway with fragrance and varying types of foliage. Above an obelisk surrounded by English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote'), *Nepeta*, *Salvia x sylvestris* 'May Night', and lamb's-ears (*Stachys byzantina*) creates a formal focal point on the walkway that connects patio to paddock. Below With 21 grandchildren, including Elle and Sarah, the Howarths have plenty of visitors. Grandkids flock to the acreage to garden, hang out with the critters, and help feed the swans that live by the lake.

Everything is possible.

That's what Donna Howarth knew when she and husband Bill first looked at the timeworn 1960s trilevel set on 5 lakeside acres. Instead of seeing an uninspiring landscape, she envisioned lushly planted gardens with a lake beyond. Taking in a vacant, weathered red barn, she foresaw a crisp white-painted outbuilding bustling with animals. Seven years later, her dreams are reality.

"I look at this place in awe," Bill says. "When Donna does something, it always turns out better than I expected. As we first toured the house, with its dog-stained carpets, and saw the overgrown trees that blocked the lake views, Donna said, 'Just squint a little—it will be OK. This can work!' If you told

me seven years ago that this would be the result, I don't think I would have believed it."

Today, blousy perennial beds and abundant vegetable gardens, blue-water vistas, and barnyard clucks compose a multisensory melody that sets the tempo for Donna and Bill's laid-back country lifestyle. Located a mile west of downtown Barrington, Illinois, the property provides the couple and their visiting children and grandchildren rural pleasures with close-to-town convenience. Most important, it gives Donna, who has been fighting ovarian cancer for 17 years, a daily dose of recuperative serenity.

The site's curative powers have been in play since 1999,

when Donna and Bill began renovations. The couple moved in during the remodeling—shortly after Donna underwent a bone marrow transplant—to oversee the construction projects, both indoors and out.

"The process of putting the house and garden all together was very therapeutic—it kept my mind focused," Donna says. "Looking at the land, I saw something positive."

As contractors hammered away, Donna and Bill worked with landscape designer Pete Wodarz to create gardens in tune with the home's architectural revival and inspiring pastoral setting.

"I wanted something loose and informal—something with





“There’s a serenity to my environment that is very healing.”
—Donna Howarth

GARDENING FOR THE SOUL

“The gardens and vistas offer health benefits—psychological, spiritual, and physiological,” Donna Howarth says. “We plan our meals around what’s fresh, which has to have a health benefit. There’s a serenity to my environment that’s very healing.”

To create a garden that nourishes both body and soul, try some of Donna’s techniques.

Create a serene scene. Place pastel flowers and plants with variegated foliage in the front of your borders for a peaceful, easy feeling.

Please all the senses. Donna positioned a row of lavender at the edge of the swimming pool so swimmers could smell the scent in the breezes.

Plant for all seasons: As iris, peonies, and catmint fade, white phlox, queen of the prairie, shrub roses, and hydrangea carry the gardens through summer. In fall, tall grasses and hydrangea shift in color and lend the beds a different texture.

Keep it organic. Donna and Bill rarely use pesticides and strive to grow their crops organically. Each fall, after cleaning up the vegetable beds, Bill covers the beds with “zoo doo,” a mixture of sheep, goat, and chicken manure he gathers from animal pens and chicken coops. The manure breaks down over the winter; in spring, he turns the composted material into the beds.

Make it accessible. The couple added a garden within steps of the kitchen so Donna can easily harvest herbs, peppers, lettuce, carrots, and beets.

Take advantage of the view. During remodeling, Donna had her kitchen range placed to face the windows overlooking the gardens; French doors in the family room invite outdoor views inside.



Above Gravel paths link the barn to the rest of the garden areas and the house. Siberian iris (*Iris siberica* ‘Caesar’s Brother’), peonies, assorted daylilies, *Nepeta* ‘Blue Wonder’, and spiked speedwell fill the flowerbeds with fragrance and varying types of foliage. Opposite right The Howarths’ grandsons love to visit and cast a line into the lake.

VISIT DONNA’S GARDEN

On June 15–16, Donna Howarth will share her Chicago-area retreat as part of the Barrington Country Garden & Antique Faire’s garden tour. This event helps raise awareness and funds for Hands of Hope, which helps mobilize communities to respond to needs of women and children in crisis, especially those impacted by AIDS and HIV in Africa. For more information: www.handssofhopeonline.org; 847/622-5201.

a country feel,” Donna says. “When I was a child, my mother gave me *Golden Books* with illustrations of English gardens with flowers I had never seen before. And when I read *Peter Rabbit*, I thought Mr. McGregor’s garden was one lovely garden. As a child, I said to myself, *Someday, I’d like to be in gardens like that.*”

Donna allows the flowers she loves most to take center stage. In spring, huge clumps of catmint (*Nepeta*) spill across the paths and white peonies shine throughout the borders.

“I love blue catmint,” Donna says. “And I have a passion for white flowers. I absolutely love peonies—the saucer-shaped peonies—so we put a lot of those in. I love the

PeeGee hydrangea [*Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Grandiflora’] and ‘Annabelle’ hydrangea [*H. arborescens*] for their big conical, orblike blooms. White flowers please me so much—they’re very calming,” Donna says, adding with a grin, “It’s so Zen.”

Zen-like in their influence, the gardens promote a sense of peace and renew Donna’s strength, Bill says. “They have been an extremely important and healing component in Donna’s life. Nothing makes her happier than watching a little seed sprout and blossom,” he says. “Gardening has been a part of everything she’s always been—she watches over the gardens just as she watched our kids blossom and as she now watches our kids’ kids blossom.”

As Donna continues chemotherapy treatment, there are days when her energy flags. When she’s not feeling her best, Donna drinks in the panoramic views from the family room or kitchen windows. She spends her downtime reading about gardening, planning future projects, and simply taking in the wonders that she and Mother Nature have wrought.

“What I look out on is actually more important to me than what is inside this house,” Donna says. “You can’t be in this type of environment with the nature, the birds, the wildlife, the lake, and the pasture and not feel the wonder of creation around you. You can’t fully realize how healing that can be.” ■

For more information, see the Buyers’ Guide on page 100.