

Bloom where you're planted!



By Evangeline Doyle

Bloom where you're planted...sage advice, from Julie Prohaska, who moved to Vernonia in 1979. Initially Julie wasn't thrilled with the move. In fact she cried. "I went in, threw myself on the bed and wept," chuckles Julie. I suppose when you move from 2,000 square feet of remodeled bliss, to a 900 square foot 1903 farmhouse, it would be quite an adjustment.

It wasn't until she relaxed and realized where she'd landed, that things turned around. Now Julie Prohaska is all smiles, "I just can't imagine life anywhere else," she said, "I just love Vernonia...each year I love it more and more."



Julie and her husband Bob Prohaska live on a beautiful three-acre farm in downtown Vernonia – the acreage was previously part of the larger Van Blaricom Farm in 1903. Julie's husband's business brought their small family to Vernonia. Her daughters were just 5 and 7 at the time. Today, these young women are grown and out on their own, and now their mother is tending to other living things...her gardens. Beautiful gardens, of cottage flowers and naturally-grown vegetables.

Julie has been gardening her whole life. As a child, Julie loved spending time with family members that were gardeners. Watching things grow and the miracle of seed-to-plant fascinated her. Julie enjoys the entire process of growing, "Seeing something become what it's destined to be," Julie says, "It's just magical for me...I never tire of it."

"Gardening has brought so much joy to my life" said Julie, "And sharing my love for gardening with others has brought me so many wonderful new friendships...they are all so positive and intelligent – it makes me want to be a better person." She beams, "It's just so inspiring to be around people like that!"

And friends have inspired Julie. Friends suggested she start selling her beautiful cottage flower bouquets in downtown Vernonia in 2003. This was difficult for her initially, she said, "I avoided driving by the flower stand, for fear they'd still be on

the cart!" But when she saw the cart was empty, she quickly got over that concern, and business took off.

Now it's 2007, and Julie is gearing up for a new season and a new offering – fresh vegetables. Julie gardens naturally, without chemicals. She uses natural fertilizers like llama, steer and chicken manure – and solarization for weed control. She says, "Solarization is pretty effective using clear plastic, but it's not a quick process – it can take many months." She reiterated that her gardening process is natural, not organic, she says, "It takes three years to become certified-organic."

Julie really puts herself into what she's growing. She thought, "I think some people have forgotten that this is what farmers do. I care about what people are eating, and wish everyone could eat from farm-to-table, but I know that's not always realistic." Julie has planted varieties that will do well in our short growing season, and is focusing on greens: Lettuces, beet greens, spinach, bok choy, chard. These vegetables naturally have a shorter shelf-life -- Julie's Gardens offers a chance to avoid spoilage caused by hauling and handling.

Although Julie loves the physical hard work that gardening entails, she also looks forward to recharging her batteries each year. During the off-season Julie loves to read, travel and learn new things. This year was very special, as she traveled to Paris with several Vernonia friends. She's also enjoying a new educational tape series called The Great Courses; she and a friend are currently studying Western Civilization, and next up is St. Francis of Assisi.

Julie's mom always asks her, "Are you done with all your gardening now?" Julie replies, "Mom, you're never really done." But that's what keeps Julie going, -- still smiling, she says "When I put the garden to bed at the end of the season, I'm already thinking about next year!" I'd say Julie did an awesome job of blooming in Vernonia. And we're glad she's here!

To order vegetables, or to learn more about Julie's gardens, call 503-429-7055.

Julie's cottage flowers will start selling the end of June. Her flower cart will be parked outside Out on a Limb and Buckleberry Cottage, at 919 Bridge Street, in downtown Vernonia.



Vegetable Schedule

June: Lettuces

June/July: Spinach, Beet Greens

August/September: Garlic, Onions, Bok Choy, Cucumbers, Chard, Zucchini, Squash

"You don't need a lot of land to grow your own vegetables." Julie's tips for Vernonia-area gardeners, "Wait to plant warm-weather crops until mid-May, as there's still potential for frost. Our spring season is typically 3-4 weeks later than the valley (Forest Grove and Hillsboro). We also have cooler evenings and early morning dew which cools down the plants." She recommends cold frames and row covers for holding in the heat, and raised beds help you plant a little bit earlier too.

