

Gardening Inexpensively Karen Hannisse



Peterborough and Area Master Gardeners
<http://peterboroughgardens.ca/articles.html>

Gardening is like life sometimes. I've noticed over the years that it seems to work if you take two problems, pair them together and they become a solution to each other. Sometimes this is a type of recycling and at other times it's rethinking. It's a great feeling when you stumble across two such things and they check each other off the list.

I've moved around a great deal, often starting from scratch and always with a limited or no budget. I'd make lists of what I considered to be assets, needs or annoyances on the property and lie awake at night trying to combine them into something of beauty. So many times it has happened in an uncanny way and I wonder how I didn't see it earlier.

Here is a list of some of my successes that may inspire you to rethink your opportunities:

Leaves - that is a no brainer. Don't rake them and throw them out. Compost them or mulch them and save yourself a great deal of watering and weeding. Let the worms do the work. I've run ads in the paper asking for people to bring me literally hundreds of bags of their leaves that were destined for the dump. You know what they say "One man's trash....". The leaves were applied to bedrock on a hillside and believe it or not I successfully grew perennials in the best garden I ever had. There has been so much talk about the benefit of leaves and compost but still people spend a lot of time and money because they can't stand them in their yard. "Leave and let leave" whenever you can.

Pavement was where I wanted a garden and sod where I wanted another one just a short distance apart, although the distance did seem to get greater as the job wore on. I had no money for soil so the sod was removed, flipped upside down in its new location on the drive where it subsequently died. Both locations received a hefty layer of leaf mulch and daffodils grew surprisingly well right over the pavement. Even though it was just a driveway, everyone oohed and aahed over it.

I once had too much goat and chicken manure which I mixed with wood shavings and leaves to fill in a low spot and level out the ups and downs of the terrain. When a relative gave me too many raspberry canes and I had a place ready. Pumpkins grew with no watering, weeding or fertilizer in the same kind of 'casual' location. We ended up with way too many

pumpkins. We used them as inexpensive (\$0) and novel Thanksgiving presents for all our friends.

All those boulders/rocks in the way of the lawnmower just took a little elbow grease, no money, to rearrange into lovely sweeping curves to outline beds. It saved buying edging and all the fuss of trying to pound edging in when Canadian Shield was just below. Similarly, flat rocks became flagstone paths.

A massive sandbox that the kids outgrew was turned into a raised bed garden project.

Ugly structures can become a 'trellis' by covering them with morning glories or scarlet runner beans.

An over-abundance of a particular type of perennial in your garden could be turned into cash for local charities doing plant sales. You might try phoning to see if someone would come dig them up for you. I have found many friends in the past through the exchange of excess plants. In the beginning, I was the recipient of someone's generosity but eventually, I was able to give plants away too. I enjoy the relationships and education that inevitably accompanies the plants.

Leftover tree stumps become focal points especially when paired with a bird feeder or container of flowers that needs a flat place to sit. A fellow Master Gardener pointed out at a recent presentation how he used slices from felled trees as stepping 'stones' making watering easier and kerhim from having to stand on the soil.

Group planting beds together instead of in little bits and pieces randomly around your home. The fewer things to mow around, the less time it takes. Edges are a pain, so minimize the number of them that need to be handled (think king-size rather than two twins). Curve the edges so the mower can handle it, and mulch around trees so you don't need a weed-wacker. Do not let the mulch touch the tree's trunk though or you'll end up with a 'bird feeder holding' stump when it dies on you.

Find plants that grow best in tougher soils if that's what you've got. Some herbs, for example, concentrate their flavours in more rugged conditions. Rocky areas can hold more heat from the sun and cause some plants to thrive. So consider growing plants that are appropriate for what you have to work with instead of investing in changing what you have.

If you change your perspective, you may find that something bugging you in your garden is not so annoying after all. Moving it mentally to the 'assets' column has the potential to save money and labour.

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