

# A PASSIONATE GARDENER

by Robert Haehle

M.E. Depalma-Ford is a true Renaissance woman. She has been a private investigator, an embalmer, a large-size model, and an industrial consultant. She has written seminars and training programs for corporations and newspaper and magazine articles. She is also the co-author of the book, *A Garden Diary: A Guide to Gardening in South Florida*. She currently has her own Web design company ([www.depalmaenterprises.com](http://www.depalmaenterprises.com)) and is the Webmaster for the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc.

On the advisory board for "Naturescape Broward," M.E.'s efforts in presenting classes to the public on native plants, butterfly gardening, and more have helped Wilton Manors qualify as a "Naturescape Broward" community. Her garden has been recognized as both a National and Florida Backyard Wildlife Habitat.

M.E.'s specialty is butterfly gardening. To entice "flying flowers" to her yard, she uses blue and purple salvia, sage, butterfly weed, passion vine, dill, porterweed, beautyberry, thryallis, marsh mallow, hibiscus, and her feature plant, the desert cassia (*Senna polyphylla*). Larval plants that feed the caterpillars are located at the back of the garden. (Most cater-



A harsh, hot wall is cooled by lush plantings, including *Begonia odorata* 'Alba' and a giant philodendron.

pillars feed only on a select group of plants and will not decimate your whole yard.)

M.E. gets thoroughly involved in the installation and layout of her plantings. Turning her driveway into an attractive garden and terrace was one challenge. Another was a bare

west wall facing her swimming pool. M.E. had a fountain installed and uses vines, like a carefully-controlled *Ficus repens*, flame vine, hoyo, and purple allamanda, to help soften the hot wall. Louisiana iris blooms in the fountain which is surrounded by heat-tolerant kalanchoe and purple queen. Potted bromeliads are used for additional color when they are in bloom. Other plants for hot, sunny sites include desert rose and dwarf crown of thorns, which are also good pot subjects. Any of the succulents do well in this location. One advantage of using these plants is that they need minimal watering and care and



In her English-style garden it's "as if nature scattered the seeds," says M.E. Depalma-Ford.

one can go on vacation without worrying about them.

The most recent addition to M.E.'s property is a rose and English garden. She chose Jackson & Perkins roses on Fortuniana rootstock, the preferred rootstock for Florida conditions as it resists nematodes and other soil pests that dramatically shorten a rose's life. The commonly-used Dr. Huey rootstock will last for 2 to 3 years, while Fortuniana rootstock can easily last 50 years or more.

M.E.'s garden is a grand mix of many kinds of roses, including the hybrid teas 'Chrysler Imperial' and 'Double Delight'; floribundas 'Hot Cocoa', 'Disneyland', 'Tuscan Sun', 'Fragrant Wave', and 'Our Lady of Guadalupe'; grandiflora 'Gold Medal'; climber 'Joseph's Coat'; shrub rose 'Gypsy Dancer'; and antique roses 'Mutabalis' and

'Duchess De Brabant'. Hybrid teas, grandifloras, and floribundas are susceptible to black spot, which defoliates and weakens the plants. Shrub and antique roses resist black spot. Safer sulfur-based fungicides are organic and work well on mildew and rust, and can control outbreaks of black spot

if sprayed every 10 days.

M.E. installed soaker hoses beneath the soil to water the roses and minimize black spot. Roses require a minimum of 6 hours of sun, good air movement, and good drainage. They will not grow in a poorly-drained location.

Other plants for the English-style garden consist mainly of winter annuals that are planted in October and last till late May. The Garden Gate at Sears in Pompano Beach is a good source for these plants (954-783-1189). Local nurseries offering antique roses include Jesse Durko's nursery in Davie (954-792-2297), Jane's Herbs and Things in Davie (954-472-1677), and Abell's Nursery in Lake Worth (561-969-1138).

M.E. grows orchids, begonias, and herbs on her back porch overlooking a canal. Her favorite begonia, *B. odorata* 'Alba', blooms for at least 9 months of the year and is a real beauty. (Jesse Durko's nursery carries it.) M.E.



photo by John Brooke

*M.E. Depalma-Ford has done it all and her garden reflects her passion.*

has turned a dying tree into a "bromeliad tree" by tying epiphytic bromeliads onto it with panty hose. By the time the panty hose rots off, in about a year, the bromeliads will be well attached. This also works with orchids.

In a small, sunny garden, a beautiful pinwheel jasmine tree flowers most of the year. The 'Knockout' rose, which has excellent black spot resistance, a Thailand crown of thorns, and hanging hoyas are also featured here.

M.E. has done a great job with her small property. The lack of lawn eases maintenance concerns considerably, but it's her passion for butterflies and beautiful plants that keeps things lively.

*Robert Haehle is a garden writer and consultant from Fort Lauderdale. He also wrote "What's New for 2006" on page 36.*

## SUGGESTED READING

### *A Garden Diary*

Robert Haehle and M.E. Depalma  
([www.agardendiary.com](http://www.agardendiary.com))



photo by Barbara Richie

*M.E. raises award-winning hibiscus, such as 'Tyleno', a grey variety.*