# **Letting Seeds Fall Where They May**

LINDA AND DON KUZAK HAVE COMBINED A LOVE OF GARDENING AND FOLK ART TO CREATE A LITTLE PIECE OF ENCHANTMENT IN THEIR OHIO TOWN.



A section of the Kuzaks' front yard offers hydrangea, black-eyed susans, and Siberian iris, among other blooms. Don's folk-art airplane hovers above a tree stump and an old milk cart sits nearby.

There's a little piece of enchantment in the northeastern Ohio town of Mogadore, a yard where flowers bloom in profusion, vines create tiny havens of shade, and whimsical folk art makes children and grown-ups smile as they stroll past.

"I want it to look like God had a big handful of seeds and just dropped them here on the ground and everything grows just as natural as can be," says Linda Kuzak, who has tended this remarkable garden for several years. "But that's just me."

Hers is a story of love regained – a love of growing things in rich soil, and even a renewed relationship with a man she knew forty-some years ago.

The story goes like this: Linda was born in Pittsburg and as early as four years old remembers visiting her grandmother in Butler, Pennsylvania. "We'd visit her and I remember how I could smell the dirt, how good it smelled and how you could put your hands down in it. I loved it then and I've continued loving it." But life has taken her many miles from her grandmother's garden, spending her growing and adult

years in California, Washington State, Georgia, Florida, and even an earlier stint in Ohio.

She spent several years in Florida before moving back to Ohio in 2009. "I did some gardening in Florida, but it can be hard to garden there," she says. "I'd see magazine articles showing gardens in Ohio and it was like a dream. I'd think, 'Can you imagine being able to garden like that?' So when I got up here, it was just a matter of weeks and I'd dug up all the grass in the front yard."

But that's another part of the story.

## "Thrilled Beyond Words"

Don Kuzak grew up in Mogadore, a suburb of Akron first settled in 1807. "Mogador" is Arabic for "beautiful." He graduated from high school there, attended Kent State University, got drafted in 1968 and did a tour of duty in Vietnam, returned to Kent State and got a degree in art education in 1973. He spent the next 32 years as an art teacher and then as an administrator with the Summit Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. He used art to help people.



Top: Don's handmade railing on the front steps sports a couple of gourds for decoration.

Above: Dense cottage-style gardens fill the front yard, with plenty of gooseneck, loosestrife and bee balm providing both color and fragrance. On the porch is a large twig trellis that will be covered with morning glories as the season progresses.





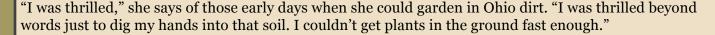
Above: The old milk cart and rusted milk can add variety to a section of the front garden while, at left, a couple of carved stones provide a birdbath amid the blooming yarrow and lobelia.

Below: Don created this folk art goose from various pieces provided by different friends. Near it are several wild strawberry plants that grow abundantly through the entire yard.

"Linda and I met in high school," he explains. "She moved here her senior year and I asked her out. I was dating someone else at the time and I figured it wasn't the right thing to do, so I told her I couldn't go out with her." Linda moved away yet Don always remembered her. "Everybody here had lost track of her." Then he spotted her name online and was able to contact her and they began corresponding. "We finally got together after 43 years."

Don grew up three houses down from where he and Linda now live on one of Mogadore's main streets. His best friend had lived in this house, which his friend's great-grandfather had built in 1902. Don eventually bought the house and had lived there 10 years before reconnecting with Linda. "I'd built a deck and had a climbing hydrangea on the arbor in the back yard," he says. "I'd been gardening with some vegetables. I had quite a few plants, but nothing like this."

As Linda said, most of the grass in the yard lasted two weeks after her arrival.



## "People Are Surprised"

Starting in the front yard, it took Linda and Don about two years to work their way around the yard to create the garden they envisioned. Actually, the yard – which is a standard size residential lot – contains





Top: Don and Linda built their pond in a side yard about three years ago, and it now has profuse water lilies, at least two dozen goldfish, and a folk art figure of man, as well as a bird Linda brought with her from Florida. The big sign is a Pennsylvania antique.

Above left: The little pump recirculates the pond's water, which adds visual interest plus eliminates mosquitos.

Above right: The aptly named "Junk Sculpture" is made of pieces of rusted metal the Kuzaks have gathered hither and yon. "One of its pieces we spotted alongside the road so we went back and picked it up, and here it is," Linda laughs.

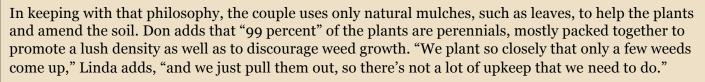


several garden areas defined by gravel paths, a pond, stretches of rustic twig fencing, and an archway of corkscrew willow, among other natural borders.

"People are surprised," Linda says. "They'll come in and be here for two hours, just looking around. We love that."

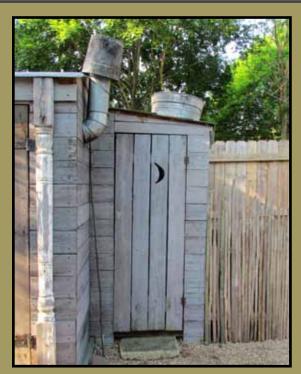
From the start, friends and neighbors offered starts and cuttings from their own gardens to add to the profusion of plants the Kuzaks were growing. "Most everything we grow in our vard is something that someone gave to us," Don says. "We've purchased a few things, but most everything inside and outside the

house is recycled. Probably the only thing in the house that's not recycled is the electronics."



## "Puttering Around"

Here and there throughout the gardens are playful art and rustic woodcraft – an array of whirligigs, twig trellises, wooden people and creatures, and even one sculpture appropriately named "junk,"

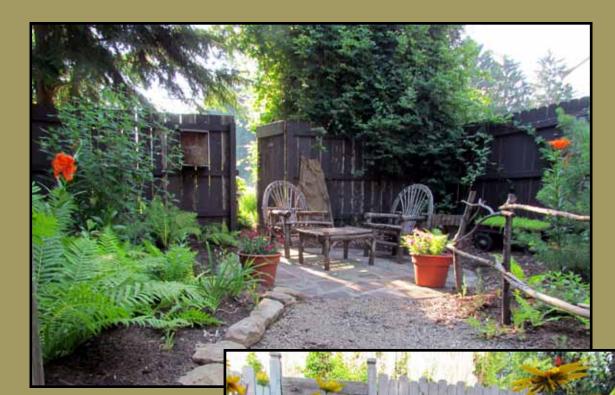


Top: This intriguing pathway runs through the backyard to Linda's cabin. Don maintains it by trimming a tunnel through the lush corkscrew willow and the climbing hydrangea growing there.



Above left: Don's workshed holds his tools and features a faux chimney pipe. His plan is to turn the fake outhouse into an outdoor shower.

Above right: If you open the door of the fake outhouse and interrupt this folk art man, he raises his arm to signal you to stop. Don rigged it up as a playful surprise for visitors, and it works.



Above: A peaceful section of the side yard, with a gate leading directty to the front yard.

Right: Rudbeckia blooms add vibrant color to one of the many flowerbeds.

Below: Don constructed this folk art animal of weathered wood and named it "Roscoe" after one of his Mogadore High School teachers.



"When I retired I ran out of things to do," Don jokes. But in truth his fondness for art goes back to his education and career. Over the years, he played with creating folk art, especially whirligigs, and sold them at shows in Akron and Canton. On the subject of whirligigs, he laughs, "The whimsy part comes easy to me, the engineering part doesn't – it takes some thinking to figure out how to place the wires so things will actually move."

"He's like a little boy," Linda says. "You send him out to play in the morning and he comes home when it's time for dinner. He'll spend the whole day outside puttering around, then I'll go out and there'll be something he built."

Gardening has not been the couple's only creative outlet, by far. Since their marriage, they have literally changed the interior of their home from a conventional setting of wallpaper, carpets and mainstream color schemes to a far more primitive log-cabin setting. Walls of recycled cedar now mimic logs and chinking, homespun curtains frame the windows, woodwork is painted in umber tones, wood floors abound, and their furniture now more closely reflects the Ohio frontier of the early 1800s.

"It wasn't primitive at all until I moved here," explains Linda, who was first exposed to this style of décor while living in Florida and becoming friends with several women fond of the simpler, more weathered look. "Don and I started in the kitchen and just worked our way through the entire house. It's been sort of a backward evolution to a very simple, early look."

#### "Everybody Sees Our Yard"

The Kuzak property is in a neighborhood of manicured yards along a main thoroughfare, which means people frequently walk past.



Tree limbs arch over this section of the backyard that looks from the driveway to the rear of the property. At the left is the corkscrew willow pathway with a nearby hanging swing nearly concealed amid flowers and vines. A rusted bicycle, whirligig, twig trellis, and primitive fencing add a sense of enchantment to the yard.

"Everybody sees our yard," says Linda. "If we're in the drugstore or someplace, people will say, 'Oh, you're the people with the yard with all the flowers. It's so sweet when people walk by, some pushing their strollers and they'll stop so the babies can look at the flowers."

"There's a place on the front porch where we can sit and people can't see us from the sidewalk. We can hear what they're saying as they walk past, and it's always good. We always keep our gate open for unexpected visitors, because part of the fun of having a garden is sharing it."

Both Linda and Don admit they're not influenced by any profound philosophy of gardening or traditional techniques on how to grow plants. "And we're also not inhibited by other people's opinions on what a garden should look like," she adds. "We pretty much let our own creativity be our guide out there. Whatever interests us, we do it."

And it certainly seems to interest others as well, and in a very good way.



Don built this structure originally as a potting shed for Linda, and later expanded it. It has a sleeping area with primitive cot and an adjacent room with a sink and cupboard. Linda calls it her "little cabin on a hill" and likes to lie on the cot and read. Don says, "Last winter I put a heater in there and it was cold and snowing and we sat in there and drank hot chocolate. It was pretty neat."

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