

Gardener *with a big heart*

Angela Granic happily shares her passion — and her plants

BY KELLY PEDRO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TARA WEST

You can see Angela Granic's garden almost as soon as you turn onto her quiet street not far from the University of Waterloo. Colour bursts from a backdrop of green. Butterflies play around her dahlias and lilies. Bees are found on the petals of soft pink roses.

But it's not just Granic's garden that overflows with delight, but also her generosity, blooming in the gardens of her neighbours, where shared clumps



There are too many varieties of flowers in her Waterloo garden for Angela Granic to name.



of black-eyed susans and red lilies sprout from the soil. Her generosity also extends to the city property next to her house, which blooms vividly thanks to her hard work and plantings.

“People say the city should pay me for that,” she says with a laugh.

“But I just love it. It keeps you busy and keeps your mind off of things. I love to see things grow and it makes me happy.”

Her giving nature has extended to strangers too. She’s been known to divide her hostas and perennials and load them into the trailers of those who have asked. One time she stopped a woman in line at a grocery store waiting to buy a hosta.

“I asked her how much and she said \$9.99.” Granic told the woman to leave the hosta and come by her house — she had plenty and would share them for free.

Granic pulls out gifts the woman has given her ever since. “She brings me slippers and shawls. She crochets and always brings me things,” Granic says, laying a green knit shawl across her hands to show it off.

Granic started gardening more than 35 years ago and has had a garden at nearly every home she and her husband, Peter, a builder, have had.

At first it was a way to keep busy, but over time it’s become her haven, a place where she relaxes outside, walking among the colourful blooms early in the morning with a steaming cup of coffee in her hand.

She is so consumed with her garden that one year she extended flower beds one foot at a time, measuring on the grass from toe to heel, so that Peter wouldn’t notice. He wanted her to relax and thought she was working too hard in the garden, but Granic

says she enjoys it so much and didn’t want to give it up.

“Summer is so short, and winter is so long,” she laments.

These days there are so many varieties of flowers in her garden Granic can’t name all of the species. She loves them all, she says, for their colours.

The City of Waterloo loves them too.

Not long after she moved into her home 17 years ago and created a small garden featuring hostas and rocks, Granic’s green thumb made its mark with second place in Waterloo’s Communities in Bloom. The following year, after expanding her garden, she earned top marks for her ward.

“They gave me a \$50 gift certificate, but I don’t even think I used it. I forgot all about

it,” she says now.

Granic says she stopped participating in garden tours and awards because she didn’t have the time. Looking around you can see why.

Her property boasts more than 200 dahlias — ball and pompon dahlias, border dahlias, cactus dahlias and the impressive bold blooms of dinnerplate dahlias. She once had 150 lilies as well but squirrels dug many of them up, she says.

That collection of flowers alone would be enough, but among the dahlias and lilies are a vast array of roses, foxglove, clematis, hostas and vegetables, such as cucumbers, beans and tomatoes. There are so many tomato bushes Granic will make 20 jars of tomato sauce from the harvest to share among her children and to keep in her cellar over the winter.

Her garden has drawn attention from neighbours, walkers, garden enthusiasts and photographers. Some of her flowers were featured in photographer ManChoi Chow’s exhibit “Attitude” at Uptown Gallery Waterloo in 2017. Chow still has an entire section of his website dedicated to the “Angela Granic Garden Collection.”

Granic recalls one neighbour, an older woman, who for a short time could barely walk but still visited her garden often because she admired it so much.

Granic’s garden is a small Eden nestled in north Waterloo, a natural playground for bees and monarch and cabbage white butterflies that flutter among the flowers. The butterflies, she says, are welcome visitors. The squirrels are not. Her secret sauce is the 40 bags of sheep

manure she spreads in the spring to help everything grow.

Her front walkway is lined with boxwood, violet geraniums and delicate pink roses. Next to it is a smoke tree Peter cut back so much one year, Granic didn’t think it would last, but it grew back, offering a lesson in resilience.

Dotting her front walkway are numerous calla lilies, tinted white, pink and a deep purple.

“I love those,” Granic says, stepping back and admiring the flowers.

Parsley sprouts along the front of the house, and baskets along the fence brim with flowers.

Along the fence heading toward the backyard, she sweeps aside some greenery to reveal cucumbers, curled like horseshoes around the chain-links.

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Neighbours and strangers are regular visitors to Angela and Peter Granic's colourful property near the University of Waterloo.

Opposite the cucumbers a row of black-eyed susans brighten the brick wall.

Magenta foxglove and lilies with small red blooms and a yellow fringe grow below the cucumbers and the beans.

A small flagstone path shows the way through the backyard and out through the fence toward city land.

"See? All of this belongs to the city," Granic says, motioning to the burst of colour that she has planted along the path that brightens the way for walkers and cyclists alike.

Along the city land, Granic has planted hostas, day lilies, cedar trees, daisies, rhubarb, small bushes of lilac flax, maroon

only had hostas along the fence.

"But you don't get anything out of hostas, so I dug some out and put in vegetables," she says.

"I push them through," she says, so they don't become stunted and can continue to grow in their distinct shape.

When she first started gardening, Granic

Statues and potted plants sit on the retaining wall facing a trench that separates the Granics' vegetable garden from the grass around the backyard deck.

and pink dahlias, bold sunset-hued Asiatic lilies and clematis. The dessert to this feast for the eyes ends with soft pink roses.

In the backyard, the bold palms of cana lilies sprout from between thick tomato bushes that line the back fence, along with kale, collard greens, and sweet peppers.

Four stone statues sit on a stone retaining wall facing a trench that separates the vegetable garden in the backyard from the grass around her raised deck. Granic got the statues from a woman she was helping move and who was having an auction. Before the sale, she told Granic to pick whatever she wanted so Granic scooped up the statues — one of a child carrying a



garden harvest, another of a flower arrangement, a small dog and a bust.

Granic changes her garden every year. What will she plant next?

"Whatever I can," she says. "My husband thinks I work too hard, which is true, but I love it. I love to do it because it's happiness." 🌱



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