

LIFESTYLE//GARDENING

Master gardener turns pasture into paradise

Kathy Huber, Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle
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Deep in the gently rolling countryside of Montgomery County, a small sign informs visitors they've arrived at Guyton Lane.

The big gate, which features a cheerful sun carved of metal, swings wide onto a quiet road that winds to a magical place with expansive vistas and intimate gardens.

When Jeri and Joe Guyton bought the property 12 years ago, all you'd have seen here was a 70-acre hay field. Today, the views of wildflowers and quiet ponds are as grand as a Texas sunset.

Color ripples through six acres of gardens Jeri has layered around the couple's home, two guest cottages, pool house bungalow, summer house, greenhouse and aviary.

She doesn't know exactly how many gardens she has, although at least eight of them have names.

In a garden known as the Park, shade trees planted in 2004 look amazingly mature. The soil was lousy, Jeri says, but things grow big here because she's added tons of compost.

She's doctored the property's eight soil types to accommodate a multitude of plants — among them dawn redwoods, gingers and salvias, plumerias, bottlebrushes and Mexican oleander. Jeri's favorite grass, *Muhlenbergia capillaris* or Gulf Coast muhly, also thrives: in late summer a cloud of striking pink panicles settles a foot or so over its fine-textured bluish-green foliage.

The soil in the Cactus Garden has been amended with crushed granite and sand for speedy drainage. Vegetables and flowers grow in the White Garden, which has a gazebo. The Butterfly Garden is packed with nectar-bearing blooms.

About 250 roses thrive in the Rose Garden. Among them are trial plantings of Griffith Buck roses, disease-resistant candidates for Southern garden use. (The popular 'Carefree Beauty', also known as 'Katy Road Pink,' is a Buck rose.)

The relaxing Secret Garden is tucked behind a curving wall outside a bath, and the meditative Woodlands Garden beckons from the property's back perimeter.

Vegetables grow in three places, including the Mucho Macho Garden, a 60-by-120-foot plot. Jeri plants potatoes each year. Marigolds keep the tomatoes company, and there's no shortage of asparagus, broccoli, cardoon, chard or cucumbers. What the family doesn't eat right away, she cans, freezes or gives away.

Eight types of figs share a highly productive orchard with pears, 'Republic of Texas' orange, 'Awari' satsuma and other trees. The three-year old 'Moro' blood orange put on 50 juicy, sweet fruit this season.

How has she managed such a collection? Running a legal support business for 37 years, Jeri became skilled at doing things on a very large scale, she says. She also studied soil and propagation as a Montgomery County Master Gardener and took landscape design classes at Texas A&M. She read hundreds of books and thumbed through countless magazines. On vacations, she and Joe visited gardens in Italy, Ireland and Costa Rica.

Of course, a gardener also needs to just take in her work, so Jeri's placed seating throughout the landscape.

"We like vistas," she says. "We sit outside the garden, facing the pond. We get a lot of water fowl — egrets, pelicans, pink-legged whistling ducks and geese. They put on quite a show."

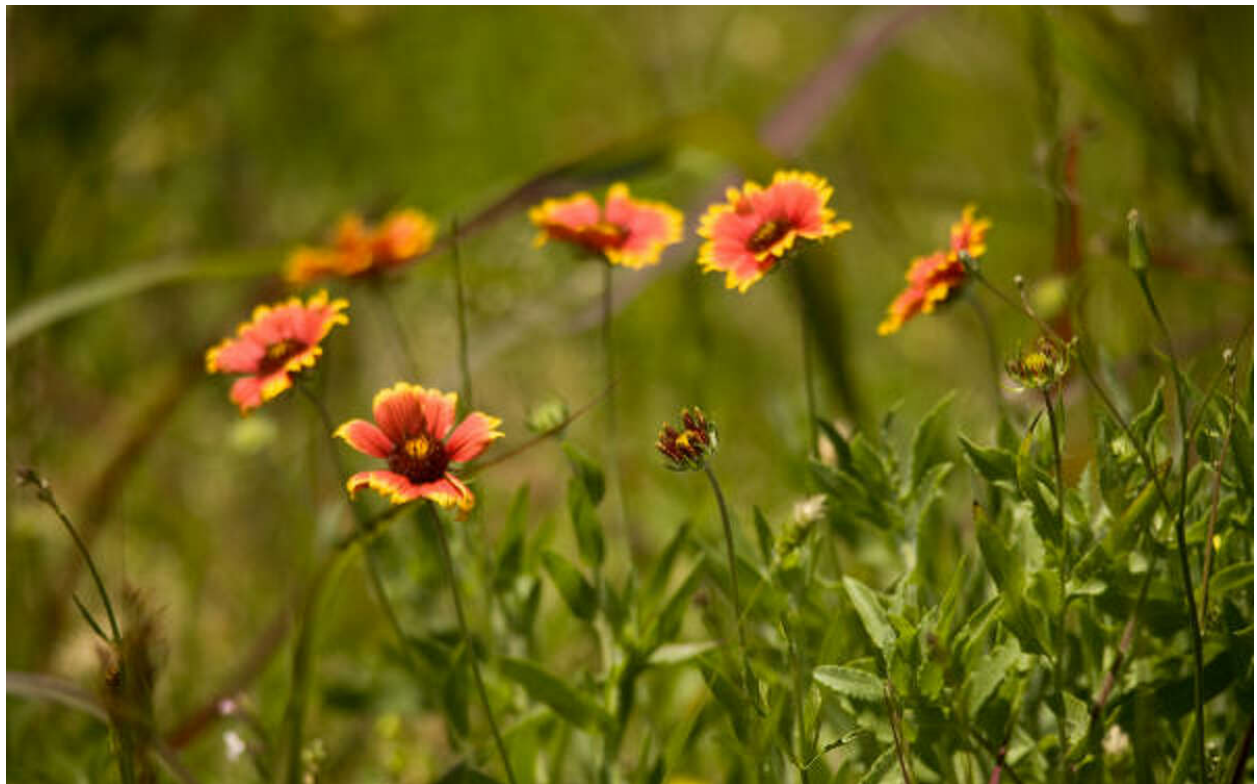
In February, she'll sow lettuce. In March, she'll set out tomato transplants.

But Jeri and Joe also have traveling on their minds. It's difficult to get away when you're tied to this much land.

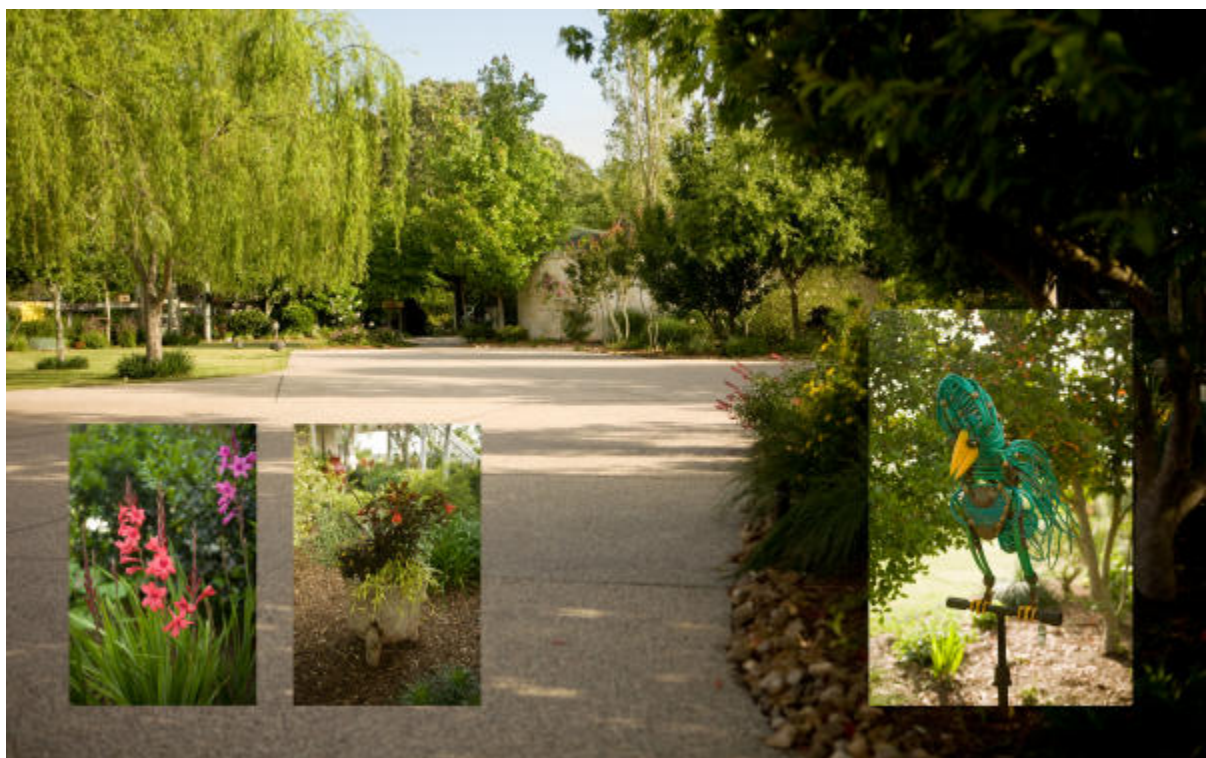
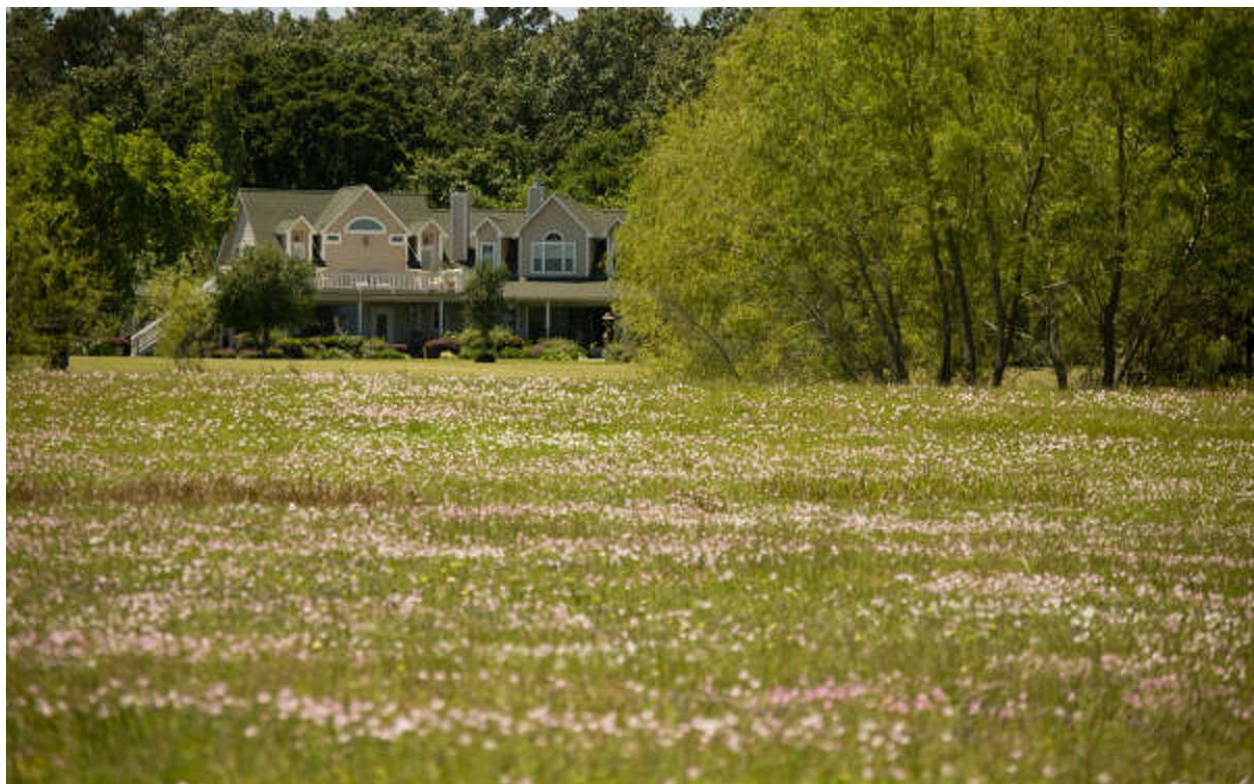
"We're considering a Hill Country garden, just five acres," Jeri says. She's interested in xeriscaping and going low-maintenance using grasses and natives.

Another matter also has her attention: "You can grow peaches over there."

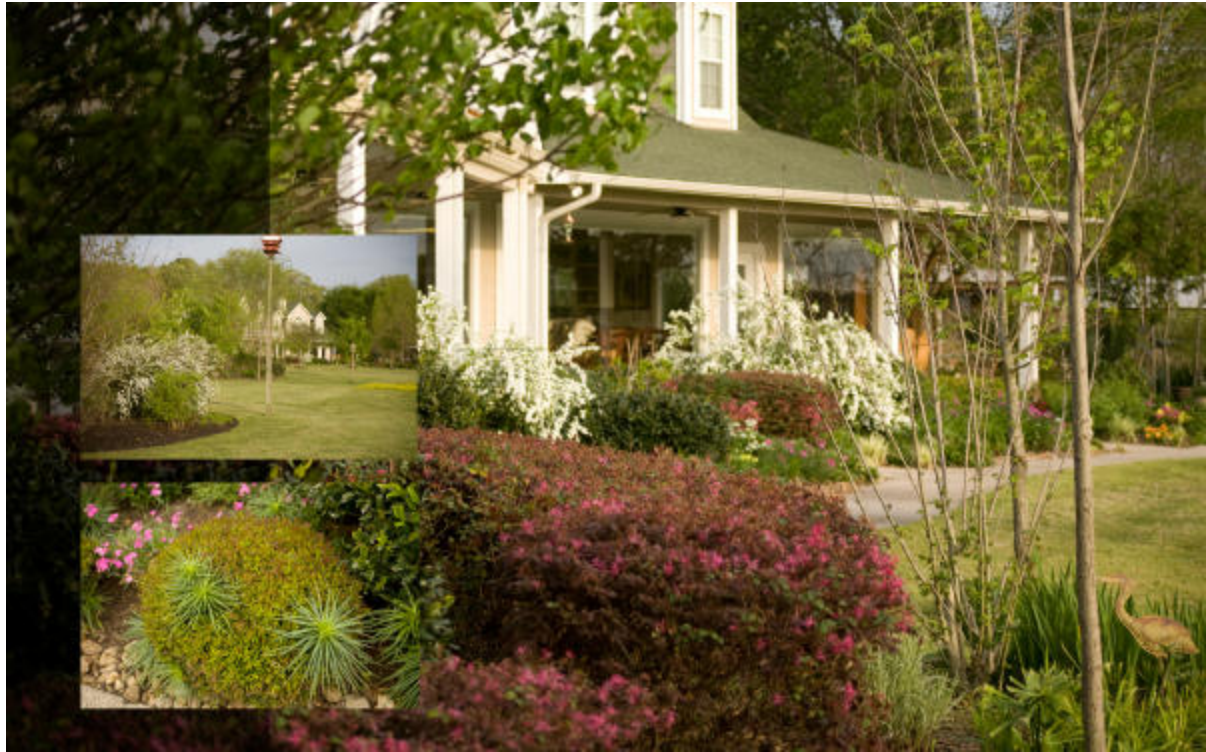
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For more pictures, click on the link to see this beautiful paradise that Joe and Jeri Guyton made prior to moving to San Antonio where there was not nearly as much upkeep.

[JERI GUYTON'S MONTGOMERY PARADISE \(chron.com\)](#)

