

FEATURED LANDOWNERS: Leanne Hutchinson

Master Gardeners Leanne Hutchinson and Barb Martinez combined their passion for gardening in the summer of 1982.

Upon meeting, they talked about their secret desire to grow something and decided to plant a raised garden in the vacant lot between their trailers the following summer.

As their friendship grew, they discovered their grandmothers were friends before Martinez's

grandparents moved to the Salt Lake Valley from Evanston. Martinez and her husband returned during the "boom years" seeking employment in the oilfields.

"I grew up eating fresh vegetables and fruit from a family garden and spent my younger years weeding, planting, and tending to family chores," she said.

Hutchinson developed her love for nature by spending summers logging in the Wasatch National Forest with her father. "Often, my brother and I would fight back and forth irritating our father so he would kick us out of the truck, and we walked a few miles. I developed an interest and love for trees and plants," she noted.

In 1995, Hutchinson's husband, Tom, heard about a parcel of land for sale by the railroad in north Evanston. Hutchinson and Martinez explored the acreage for a few months and decided their families could expand their gardening dreams so they made the investment. The property, just under 100 acres, had accumulated garbage and unused items for years that needed to be removed before the families could each build a home.

"We hauled truck loads of garbage off before the place started looking good, even an old metal box spring," said Hutchinson.

The property boasts four ponds, one of which is thermal and never freezes. Often, waterfowl collect

A decision to plant a raised garden together later bloomed into the gardening and landscaping of 100 acres by Leanne Hutchinson, left, and Barb Martinez. Their families have built their homes on the parcel.



& Barb Martinez



Vegetation invites strollers down this mason pathway.

there during the winter months, and livestock have year-round water. Last summer, they were approached by the University of Wyoming to set traps for experiments identifying insects that live on fruit trees. This year, the university set up traps in the green beans and tomato plants. Also this year, Uinta County Weed and Pest Control District personnel utilized the ponds to research mosquito populations for West Nile virus. Some of the acres grow grass hay for supplemental winter feeding for livestock.

"We don't own a tractor so our neighbor harvests the hay for a part of the crop," said Leanne. Together, they have a few horses for pleasure riding and a few cattle to provide the families with meat. Of course, laying hens for fresh eggs and peacocks strut both yards keeping the bug population down. Over the years, the kids have

taken market hogs to county fair and have raised hogs for family consumption.

The real beauty of the property is what Hutchinson and Martinez have done to enhance the landscape.

They have planted trees from the Uinta County Conservation District tree program around both homes to create a shady, peaceful zone. Beautiful brick paths lead visitors into a world of discovery at every turn. Just beyond the homes, flower gardens, path, and playhouse, are the raised gardens enclosed with a white picket fence. They discovered raised beds do better for the Evanston climate, which is a zone 4 growing season having an elevation of roughly 6,750 feet. In spring, the soil of raised gardens warms faster leading to earlier cultivation and, in fall, easier access for winter bed preparations. The soil is amended with compost, peat moss, and cocoa fiber. The entire garden area is watered with a drip system from a single water source designed by Martinez and Hutchinson for easier watering. This watering system also controls fungi growth and weeds when compared to the traditional sprinkling method.

The well is more than 300 feet deep and provides potable water for the houses, all outbuildings, two water features, and irrigation needs. Crops include corn, peas, cauliflower, broccoli, squash, beans, cabbage, and many root crops such as beets, carrots and potatoes. Sensitive plants, such as tomatoes, are grown in an area enclosed with glass attached to a chicken coop, which extends the growing season. The



Raised gardens allow the soil to warm earlier in the spring in the high altitude climate near Evanston. Leanne Hutchinson, left, and Barb Martinez are Master Gardeners and their gardens show it!

garden area has presented many challenges, but the most frustrating is its location. Being the lowest part of the property, it experiences frosts in early spring and late summer. They lost much of their garden this summer to a frost in July.

Even in that event, Martinez noted, the frozen crops offer wonderful soil enhancement when tilled under. "This is the first year we sent a soil sample to the University of Wyoming soils lab. Tests revealed our soil in perfect balance with no deficiencies and high in organic matter," said Hutchinson with pride.

As their children grew, the two women invited school classes to the property for field trips. The classes monitored water vegetation growth and discussed wildlife habitat. They identified types of wildlife by tracks and discovered nesting habitats for waterfowl. Domestic animals gave students the opportunity to experience animal stewardship. For

the first time, many students realized where eggs came from.

Hutchinson said many children today live within the city limits and never understand the processes of nature. The two women said they are happy to help classroom teachers incorporate nature into classroom instruction.

The garden duo's frequent visits to the local nursery led to a job opportunity nine years ago the two women couldn't resist. The owner asked them to manage the Aspen Grove Nursery southeast of Evanston. This fortunate break offers them continuing education and access to professionals willing to provide a wealth of information.

During the winter of 2004-2005, the two attended the UW Master Gardener course at Western Wyoming Community College in Rock Springs.



This course covers many subjects important to the nursery. They have used the landscape training on their own property to create arbors, water features, borders, wildlife habitat, and weed identification that has proven priceless.

To certify as a Master Gardener, Martinez and Hutchinson initially were required to donate more than 40 hours of community service. To keep that certification, they need additional training and 20 hours of community service. They enjoy the community service and have the opportunity to provide well more than the required hours. This summer, they worked with the Evanston Jaycees to renovate a historic cemetery of the Wyoming State Hospital by planting trees and native grasses and rejuvenating existing shrubbery.

Living on so many acres also provides many challenges. Wildlife interaction is one of the most pleasing experiences, but losing many trees to deer and porcupines is frustrating. They offer no remedies and have decided they would rather see the wildlife and provide habitat than introduce extreme measures.

To save a tree, they compensate by planting more trees and protecting the species that need time to develop. There is no sure way to protect against porcupines, raccoons, and skunks other than guarding against their eating habits.

"It is hard to imagine the destruction they can do even in one night!" said Martinez.

The other challenge is thistle. "The secret is to get thistles early, and the only way is to chop them down," said Martinez. They hire their children to canvass the property several times a year.

During the winter months, the trees offer friendly habitat and forage for various winter birds and deer. The two women leave apples and other winter feed for wildlife, which adds to spectacular winter viewing. Just seeing a hoof print in the snow is exciting for both families. They allow no hunting, even to close family members.

The property is adjacent to railroad tracks. Martinez said the railroad is a good neighbor by keeping their property weed free and regularly makes property improvements.

An occasional train passes offering that bygone era when life was slower. Both Martinez and Hutchinson enjoy the sound of train cars clicking on the tracks and whistles in the distance.

Today, they have a landscaping business along with managing the nursery. They subcontract some of the work but, in general, develop landscape plans, install drip systems and rock paths, trim trees, build retaining walls, and create outdoor water features.

Most of their experience comes from their dedication to continuing education and the Master Gardener course offered through the Uinta Cooperative County Extension office. First-hand experience on their few acres has offered educational benefits that increase with each season.



A bench near Leanne Hutchinson's home.

Annette France is the education/public information coordinator for the Uinta County Conservation District and can be reached at 787-3794, extension 106, or by e-mail at annette.france@wy.nacdnet.net.