



featured

Landowners repair land damage,

By Jacelyn Downey

The arrival of Wendy Long's canned pickles and salsa is anticipated each fall. Her garden produces two five-gallon buckets of cucumbers every two weeks and enough tomatoes to give away to friends and family all summer. She still has plenty left over to make at least 45 pints of salsa, more than 50 pints of dill pickles, and other canned goods.

Wendy's garden has expanded since she and her husband, Jim Long, moved from Sundance to their 40-acre property

near Gillette 18 years ago. The Longs moved to the area when the first energy boom hit, and he went to work for the coal mines. Previously, Jim spent more than a decade on the rodeo circuit while working as a Hollywood stunt man, and later as an iron worker. Wendy also worked the rodeo circuit as Miss Rodeo Wyoming in 1969 before she met Jim.

When they first arrived at their new home, it looked very different than now. The grass had been grazed down to dirt, and there were weeds throughout the property.

Jim and Wendy were faced with a huge challenge to restore the land. The first priority was the pasture. To help the grass regrow, Jim immediately built an arena that could serve a dual purpose as corral and practice area for their children, who all participated in high school rodeo. Over the years, with hard work and much determination, they began to see improvement. Today, they rotate their two horses between the arena and the pasture to help ensure the land remains healthy.

"Some people think they need to let their horses graze all day," Jim comments, "but it's not true."

When Wendy decided to start a garden soon after they moved in, she enlisted the help of neighbors, who happened to be sheep ranchers. When asked what she did to get her garden growing, she replied, "Sheep manure."

Today, she grows anything from corn to beans to peppers. She starts most of her plants from seed but gets her peppers and tomatoes as plants from garden shops.

"This year the weather has been strange," she



The peppers did well this year.

says. Wendy normally starts the garden Memorial Day weekend, but this year she had to wait until the second week of June for temperatures warm enough to plant. She's not too worried about her crop, though. A Wyoming native, she's had to learn to deal with all sorts of weather anomalies. She's saved tomatoes from frost by cutting them from the plant, vine intact, to place them covered in the barn. Doing this allows them to continue utilizing the nutrients from the vine, yet protect them from the cold. There have been years she's



Wendy and Jim Long

landowners

reap bountiful benefits

harvested unripened vegetables from the garden, put them in crates, brought them inside her home, and then let them ripen. Luckily, she has always been able to save enough fruits and vegetables to be able to can the jellies, jams, salsas, and pickles she gives away to friends and family.

She is concerned lately about the decreasing number of bees. This year there were enough to pollinate her garden plants, but last year the bees were scarce and her beans seemed to suffer. Wendy learned from her mother, an English gardener, how to pollinate plants using a feather. She uses the feather to transfer pollen from one flower to another just like bees do. "One year I had to go from plant to plant pollinating flowers. I don't know if it was me or something else, but I had a good crop that year," Wendy reports.

While Wendy focused on her garden to help improve their land, Jim decided in 1990 to plant trees and large shrubs for a windbreak. Included were green ash, Siberian



The Long property before the windbreak was planted.

elm, crabapple, cedar, blue spruce, ponderosa pine, and chokecherry, among others. He purchased many of the trees from the Campbell County University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service office and even some from Boy Scout sales. Jim believes about 250 trees and shrubs survived out of more than 500 planted.

He says mulching has been the key to keeping the trees alive. "It keeps the soil moist; otherwise,



The trees in the windbreak are now established and thriving.

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The Longs cover some of their chokecherry and other fruit trees and shrubs with nets to protect them from birds. The rest remain uncovered for wildlife.



the sun just beats down on the dirt and creates cracks, allowing moisture to escape,” Jim advises. Today, the windbreak protects their home, barn, and arena from wind and snow.

Early on, rabbits and deer munched on their trees, but Jim built a 6-foot deer fence around the windbreak several years ago, and he puts black plastic around the base of young trees to protect them from chew damage.

They have had far fewer problems since implementing these defenses. Jim says that, out of all the trees and shrubs they planted, evergreen and chokecherry were easiest to grow; they grew fast and were resistant to parasites and other maladies. Today, many of the trees are more than 16-foot tall and are very healthy.

Water has proved to be another challenge. Initially, Jim had to haul water from

their well for each tree and the garden. Now, they have a 300-gallon water tank that fits in his pickup, and he has a hose that delivers the water. Most of the original trees are established enough to gather enough water naturally. Jim still occasionally spot-waters from a bucket, but it is less time-consuming and back-breaking than before. If you ask their children, Zac, Seth, or Kaala, they’ll say they watered a lot of trees; probably more than they want to remember.

Before Jim started planting trees, he worked on the land, digging ditches and putting in terraces to collect rain water and snow. He also dug holes in the soil and filled them with lava rock to aid in drainage. Before that, most of the water just ran off.

They also had to tackle weeds they inherited from years of overgrazing and neglect prior to their ownership. They’ve used herbicide obtained from the county weed and pest control district to help control noxious weeds on portions of the property, while Wendy usually just pulls weeds from her garden. She has trouble with field bindweed, and notes it will regrow when uprooted if you leave them near the soil. While weeds are continually invading their property, they’ve managed to stay on top of them.

“Dalmatian toadflax has been the hardest to get rid of,” reports Jim. He sprays the weed, but new areas get invaded each year in the on-going process.

The Longs did inherit a few treasures from previous owners. Nanking cherry, chokecherry, and wild plum shrubs had been planted in the yard. Many of the fruits were eaten by birds each year, so they put nets on some of the bushes and trees, and the rest are offered up to the birds and other wildlife for food and habitat.

The fruit trees and bushes have continued to thrive through the years since they moved in, and they have reaped the benefits. Wendy enjoys making jams and jellies, while Jim makes different types of wine, including several varieties of cherry, and also cranberry, rhubarb, plum, and even lemon and cactus. It takes a year to ferment his wine, but it is well worth the wait.

The Longs are still working on improving their land. Jim would like to redo some of the fencing around their house, Wendy wants to build a garden shed, and they both plan to continue adding to their garden and tree stock. It hasn’t been easy. It has taken a few years, but this former rodeo champion and rodeo queen have proven it can be done.