

~ Debbie and Jim Bierwagon – Garden #4

Since 1902, the Bierwagon family has been farming and growing grapes, plums and Bartlett pears on land in Chicago Park. In the late 1940's, Ernie Bierwagon bought an additional 100 acres with mostly Bartlett pear and apple trees. After numerous successful years, followed by a severe fire and fruit blight in the late 50's, killing off a majority of the pear trees, Ernie planted peaches, mostly Freestone, and a variety of new, young apple trees. Today, Bierwagon's offers 20 different varieties of apples. It's from this original property, that Debbie and Jim Bierwagon, Ernie's son, built their home and garden on six acres in 1995.

All of the property has been lovingly designed by Debbie and Jim, both graduates of Humboldt State; Debbie, a Forest Ranger Naturalist and Jim, who studied Range Management. One area of Debbie and Jim's garden is for the vegetables: squash, melons, peppers, kale, lettuce, peas, broccoli, garlic, zucchini and tomatoes. When the garden sits dormant, a cover crop of buckwheat helps to suppress bindweed, which Debbie says can heartily thrive. When they're ready to plant the big crops, their son, Dan, helps to prep with tilling or mowing the cover crop.

A fenced-in front yard area, with a 30' by 50' berry patch, boasts boysenberries, thornless blackberries, blueberries and raspberries. Nearby lies the Mediterranean Garden, showcasing two fig trees, olive trees, California fuchsia and sage. Across the way, ten acres of jointly owned Bierwagon family property is leased to Jeremy Mineau, of Super Tuber Farms, which sells its organically grown potatoes, carrots, cabbage and beets to local businesses and farmers markets.

The meandering rock "Island" is probably one of Debbie and Jim's favorite spots, with numerous varieties of plants and flowers, including peony, lilac, lavender, Russian sage, Shasta lilies, and, Debbie's favorite, iris. Their back patio has gone through several renditions according to Debbie, and is a work in progress. With an herb garden and a large grassy area, the beautiful yard has hosted family gatherings and weddings.

Irrigation is both NID and well. An NID ditch off Spring Valley helps to irrigate the property, with plastic irrigation hoses and a sprinkler system. Adjacent to the main house lies Debbie's greenhouse, with her starters for veggies as well as flowers. Two compost piles help to feed their 23 chickens.

Debbie admits it's a lot of work, which she and Jim manage to handle just fine on their own . . . with the sometimes help of son, Dan.

"Plants are what I love - I never feel like I'm ever done, but I love every season," she says, smiling dreamily.