

Cindy and Steve Smith ~ Garden #2

Spending summers at her great-grandfather's farm in Sebastopol, California, inspired Cindy Smith to create the visually stunning 3.5-acre property off La Barr Meadows Road in Grass Valley. In 2016, she and her husband, Steve, discovered the largely undeveloped land—complete with a house, pond, and open lawn - and made an offer that same day. Having previously lived nearby on Rattlesnake Road, they were already familiar with the area, which borders Steve's family property, Smith Vineyards.

"There really wasn't much here besides the house, pond, and large lawn," Cindy recalls. With a clear vision and plenty of determination, the couple transformed the land, adding an orchard, greenhouse, gazebo, garden shed, pool, gravel paths, vegetable garden, fire pit, and more. Their biggest challenge has been improving the soil and producing enough compost to sustain thousands of plants, trees, shrubs, and vegetables.

Visitors are first greeted by a manicured rolling lawn leading to a large pond framed by water iris and lilies. Nearby is Cindy's "secret garden," where a waterfall spills into the pond. Japanese maple, dogwood, Shasta daisies, lemongrass, and wisteria surround the space, along with a swing Steve built overlooking the water. A bridge leads to a small island planted with tulips and a crepe myrtle tree - and home to a whimsical, friendly alligator sculpture. Beyond the pond lies a cooler, shaded grove of thirteen towering redwoods arranged in a circle around a large stone. Though its origins are unknown, Cindy suspects it may have once been a sacred site.

"During the summer solstice, the sun hits the rock exactly," she says, "giving us our own bit of Stonehenge."

Throughout the property, an array of camellias, peonies, irises, lilacs, Japanese maples, and a Mimosa tree create year-round color. A flowering Kwanzan cherry stands near the pool, while a young orchard - planted with pear, apricot, apple, nectarine, and almond trees - thrives nearby. Garden art, including gnomes, turtles, stone bunnies, and benches, adds a playful touch.

Cindy laughs that she's a "plant hoarder" who can't bear to throw anything away. Her favorite place is the greenhouse, an 8-by-10-foot structure Steve built, filled with light and hand-stenciled by Cindy with a starburst floor design. In winter, it overflows with succulents, seedlings, cactus, geraniums, and citrus trees. Next to it, a 20-by-40-foot vegetable garden produces tomatoes, cucumbers, kale, broccoli, beets, carrots, potatoes, artichokes, and more.

"I just plant what I like," Cindy says. "If it doesn't work in one spot, I try another." Maintaining the property is, as Cindy admits, "a full-time job." Together, she and Steve spend two to three hours each day tending the gardens themselves, supported by NID irrigation and sprinklers - an effort they consider well worth it for a place they feel lucky to call their own.