



DESIGN  
GARDEN

**FULL BLOOM**  
Jeanne Nolan's home vegetable and flower gardens are full of produce, and are also beautifully designed landscape elements.

# DIGGING DEEP

FROM THE LINCOLN PARK ZOO TO NORTH SHORE BACKYARDS, JEANNE NOLAN PLANTS THE ORGANIC SEED.

By Thomas Connors

Right about now, anyone with a green thumb—or the hope of having one—can't wait to get down and dirty. Jeanne Nolan, founder of The Organic Gardener ([theorganicgardener.net](http://theorganicgardener.net)), has been at it for weeks. And when she isn't busy designing and maintaining gardens for a slew of residential and institutional clients (such as the Lincoln Park Zoo), she's bound to be found amid the beds at her own place in Glencoe.

Nolan is no newcomer to the notion of sustainability and the health-enhancing ways of organic gardening. At 18, she bid adieu to the North Shore and became an apprentice at Zendik Farm, a commune in Southern California. A three-month stay turned into a 17-year sojourn—and a way of life; one that plenty of people now share. "There's a higher level of awareness today about the environment," she observes. "And when you have a home garden, you really take a big step in the right direction. Having an organic garden—productive, but beautiful—is a wonderful way to do something basic to being human. We all eat, and more and more of us want to know what we're eating, where it comes from and how it was grown."

Just as presentation is half the pleasure of sitting down to dinner, the way a garden looks can be crucial to one's appreciation of growing things. "From the beginning, I was taught to value beauty as well as productivity, and we always included flowers in the vegetable garden," Nolan says. "Not only do they attract pollinators and beneficial insects, but it's very important that the gardens we create

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**FLOWER POWER**  
 Clockwise from top:  
 A white picket fence  
 defines the garden  
 space; Nolan in her  
 garden; black  
 raspberries almost  
 ready for harvest.



...CONTINUED are beautiful and made to complement our homes and landscapes.”

At The Organic Gardener, Nolan and her crew not only orchestrate nature’s beauty, but give a good deal of attention to the built aspects of a garden as well. “When I started this business,” she laughs, “I never intended to have a fencing company. But fences, irrigation and composting systems are as much a part of what we do as shaping beds for symmetry and beauty.”

Nolan’s own garden is an extensive plot on the grounds of a classic David Adler estate, where she and her husband, Verd, live in the coach house with their two young daughters. Her crops range from greens, sweet corn and pumpkins to gooseberries, currants and raspberries. Planting can be a family affair, but the kids, she admits, “are more focused on the harvesting and eating.”

Nolan has designed gardens of all sizes for clients, from small plots to 1/10 acre. Some folks want a soup-to-nuts menu of services from installation to harvest; others, not so much. “Some work side by side with our team, so when we show up to tend the garden, parents and kids are out there with us,” shares Nolan. “And a lot of families will come to us for advice and then build their gardens themselves.”

No matter what the project, after all these years in the garden, Nolan still delights in the work she set out to do back in 1987. “We live in this increasingly technology-driven, fast-paced, consumer-focused world, and an organic garden is a great way to offset that. And if not enormous, an hour or two of your time every week is all it takes. I love that my team and I can be a bridge to helping people incorporate this in their lives.” ■



PHOTO OF JEANNE NOLAN BY JILL PADDEN, ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY SUSAN VAROCK