

gardens & homes

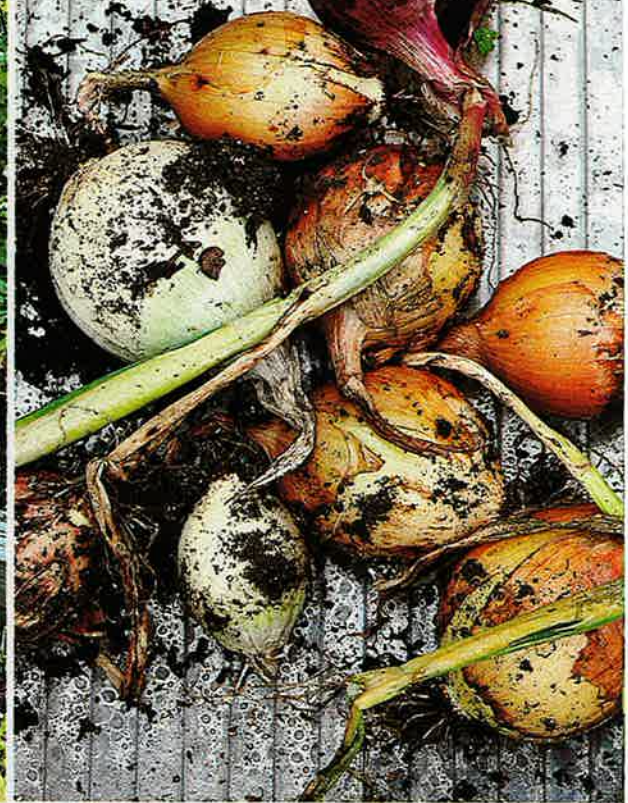
Get outside

No matter your age, a breath of warm spring air is all it takes to induce a barefoot-in-the-grass giddiness. Whether you're ploughing a vegetable plot or preening in bright spring fashion, we'll help you embrace the season.



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On the cover: The Lake Forest garden of Lyn and Bill Redfield; this page, photo of Thea Nolan, both by Susan Varick.
Editor Cindy Dampier / Art Director David Syrek / Picture Editor Michael Zajakowski / Advertisers call **Carla Mutone** at 708-498-4049



Clockwise from top: Jeanne Pinsof Nolan's daughter, Thea, 8, in her family's garden; freshly harvested onions; the garden's bucolic setting; a bee at work on a purple coneflower; Nolan and daughter Kisten, 1, some of the many varieties of tomatoes Nolan grows. Husband Verd Nolan (right) helps manage The Organic Gardener.





Organically grown

JEANNE PINSOFF NOLAN'S GARDEN GROWS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING —
INCLUDING KIDS WITH A LOVE OF ALL THINGS GREEN

BY KATHY KAPLAN PHOTOS BY SUSAN VARICK





Nolan's gardening style blends flowers such as bee balm and black-eyed Susan with squash and other edibles, creating layered shapes and colors that beg to be explored.

Jeanne Pinosof Nolan had barely moved her young family back to her hometown when the bonds of suburbia began to chafe. "We were living in Evanston," she says, "and I was already thinking I wasn't sure I could do the suburban life after so many years on the farm." Farms, that is. Nolan, a dirt-under-the-nails vegetable

gardener by training and profession, had spent 19 years in rural circumstances in California, Texas and North Carolina. So when her boss, Green City Market founder Abby Mandel, dispatched her to help some neighbors struggling with a vegetable garden, she



looked around with envy at their 4-acre swath of green.

"It was the last David Adler property in Glencoe," she says. "They were valiantly trying to grow vegetables, and as I was giving advice and my daughter was running around picking gooseberries, I said, 'Is anyone living in the coach house?'" No, the owner answered. But he'd had a fantasy that a master gardener might move in one day, and help him with the gardening. Nolan had found her new home.

Finding her dream property, complete with a garden bigger than the coach house she now shares with her husband, Verd Nolan, and daughters Thea, 8, and Kisten, almost 2, seemed positively organic — a term that aptly describes not only Nolan's profession, but her life.

Growing up in Winnetka, she was primed to follow a conventional educational track. "We were absolutely the typical Winnetka family," she says. "I was thinking about what college I would go to from the time I was in fourth grade." But while on a trip to Arizona at age 18, she discovered a health food store and had a classic "aha" moment: "They sold organic food and I had never heard the term organic before," she says. "It hit me: I decided I wanted to learn to grow food that had never had any chemicals, pesticides or herbicides applied."

And with that, Nolan's college plans went out the window faster than you can say "guidance counselor."

Her mother gamely helped her find an apprenticeship at a 75-acre farm with a 2-acre vegetable garden in Southern California. "There were two women who



The coach house where the Nolan family lives has a view of (what else?) the vegetable garden.

were master gardeners using tried-and-true organic gardening methods,” she says. Nolan spent five years learning, then discovered that her true love was teaching others how to grow organic vegetables. “I’m all about the people part — sharing the thing that I love to do so much,” she says.

Six years ago, Nolan decided it was time to come home. Without a concrete career plan, she simply started growing things. Her first Chicago-area garden was a plot of veggies she planted for her parents. Once friends saw it, they encouraged her to start her own organic gardening business. Meanwhile, she began working as assistant to Mandel, helping to run Green City Market. Together, Nolan and Mandel created the Edible Gardens, an educational garden for children in Lincoln Park Zoo, which Nolan still oversees. And her business, *The Organic Gardener*, has helped hundreds of Chicago-area families grow organic vegetable gardens.

“It’s very rewarding for me to work with a family and share the process of growing a garden,” Nolan says. “A garden is a family’s sanctuary where they can go to slow down, have quality time, connect with nature, have physical activity and eat fresh food.”

Which is exactly the kind of place Nolan has

created in her own garden. The lush, 5,000-square-foot plot is a delicious jumble of flowers and vegetables that delights the eye as well as the palate. “What I like to create in a garden is a balance of productivity, beauty and art,” she says. “The more beautiful a garden is, the more engaging it is.”

To achieve that balance, flowers — both edible varieties like nasturtium and sunflower, and strictly ornamental ones like bee balm — are a must, she says. But even veggies can become eye candy, if you play your cards right: “You can take a row of lettuce and plant it in such a way that the colors of deep red to lighter red, light green to dark green create their own mosaic or pattern,” Nolan says. Of course, her focus on her garden’s good looks doesn’t distract from its main purpose: providing fresh organic food. From the time spring lettuces unfurl their leaves through the moment she plucks the last sun-warmed tomato from the vine, you’ll find Nolan and family enjoying the harvest. Her garden regularly yields cucumbers, tomatoes (her current favorite, Sun-gold cherry tomatoes, are easy to grow), melon, corn, peppers, pinto beans, okra, potatoes, rhubarb, Brussels sprouts, artichokes, edamame and eggplant, interwoven with sunflowers, black-

eyed susan, straw flowers and more. More important, she’s cultivated a family life that centers on the garden.

The coach house, while charming, is “that sort of eco-chic trend of new smaller housing,” Nolan says wryly. “You could call it that. It’s closer quarters than your traditional suburban family, but it works for us.” Inside, the family of four makes the most of their two bedrooms and “no storage space.” Outside, though, there’s room to spare. “It’s 4 acres, there’s woods, just a huge huge garden,” Nolan says. “So much of my focus is on the green outdoor space.”

Nolan’s children have been raised planting rows and pulling weeds. “My favorite thing is involving my kids in it,” she says. As soon as spring dawns, “I’m out there with the baby, planting, going ‘pat pat pat’ putting the seed down.”

Neighbors factor in, too, as the family shares their harvest. And if a little couple time comes their way, she and Verd might settle into some chairs they’ve taken into the garden. “I love being out there,” she says, “It makes me happy to spend time out there.”

And why not? It’s there, in her lushly planted patch of ground, that Nolan can enjoy the fruits of her life’s labor: A garden full of rich, organic life.