



THE POTTING SHED

Good growing at The Bake Shop

GIRDWOOD — During Michael and Stefanie Flynn's first summer in Alaska in 1993, they were told, "You have to go to Girdwood; you won't believe the flowers." So Michael, Stefanie and her parents dutifully drove to Girdwood and had their pictures taken among the flowers in front of The Bake Shop at Alyeska Resort.

Four years later, the Flynn's owned The Bake Shop, and suddenly those flowers were Stefanie's responsibility. Longtime owner Werner Egloff and, later, a friend of his trained her over a couple of seasons. "I had to quickly learn what to do with them," she says.

First-time visitors are astonished and locals are in awe of the baskets and boxes of voluptuous blossoms that adorn the patio and stairs in front of The Bake Shop. It must be one of the most-viewed flower displays in the state.

"People take visitors and relatives and friends

POTTING SHED: *Good organization is crucial to Bake Shop's displays*

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out here because they can't believe Alaska can grow flowers like that," Stefanie says. "People can't believe the size of them and the lushness, the color display on such a small area. We go a little overboard, I know. We advertise summer outdoor dining. I want people to sit at the picnic table and ooh and ahh."

The variety of flowers — the dusty miller, marigolds, lobelia, Livingstone daisies, cosmos, lavatera, malva, malope and sweet peas, in addition to the begonias and dahlias — and the vibrant colors get plenty of oohs and aahs.

"I do choose strong colors," Stefanie says, mentioning one basket that's particularly pleasing to her eye — "a sunset hanging begonia, an orange-yellow, paired with dark-purpleimpatiens."

Stefanie's impatiens baskets are so round and full, experienced gardeners want to know how she does it. Is it some Girdwoodian rain forest magic? Stefanie credits a new greenhouse they built to replace the converted chicken coop they had been using. "This was my first season in it. It is so even in temperature, so consistent. The impatiens got a good start. The blossoms on the impatiens are incredible this year."

Stefanie starts 5,000 marigolds from seed for a triangle bed in the front. She selects triploid Zenith marigolds that don't create seedpods. "I get that from English seed; it's hard to come by. I grow that specifically for that area, because I don't need to go in there and deadhead."

It takes Stefanie an hour every day just to water. And as for feeding, "I just use the handy-dandy garden feeder," which screws into a hose and takes re-



Photo by RUSSELL ADNEY

Stefanie Flynn, owner of Girdwood's Bake Shop with her husband, Michael, is proud of her flower displays outside the eatery. "I want people to sit at the picnic table and ooh and ahh," she says.

fill packs of Miracle-Gro. It provides fairly measured fertilizing, and she has had no problem with burns or too much fertilizer.

Those mind-boggling begonias are a finicky lot, prone to powdery mildew and rot. She deadheads and cleans out the pots of all the flowers every other day, about a three-hour job. "If I don't stay on top of it, then I get rot," she says.

The scrupulous deadheading results in Stefanie's begonias continuing to produce blossoms. Her fuchsias at home, however, have dwindled "because, by the time I get home, I'm not interested." Hmm, why would that be?

In mid-April she starts making her baskets; she's not done till the end of April. "Gosh, how many baskets do I have? I have about 20 20-inch baskets and more than 16 wall baskets, about 12 16-inch baskets." Then there are the numerous containers, the squares and boxes,

balcony boxes and boxes lining the boardwalk.

Getting the baskets from the greenhouse to The Bake Shop is a huge undertaking, Stefanie says. "My husband built special transportation to take the hanging baskets without swinging, four big baskets at a time. Thanks to the ingenuity of my husband, I'm able to transport them. He always says I have to take some Valium I get so worried."

She could get her work done faster if she didn't stop to talk, but "I feel I owe these people an explanation."

"Lots of people think I can answer all their gardening questions," Stefanie says.

Many probably don't believe her when she says she's basically self-taught and that her knowledge extends only from one end of the boardwalk to the other.

Or so she says. She admits that she and Michael have started growing vegetables in their



Photo by MICHAEL FLYNN

A new greenhouse helped the Flynn's give an early start to their impatiens baskets. They have also started growing vegetables in the greenhouse. Stefanie relies on praying mantises to battle aphids.

greenhouse this year: peppers, cucumbers, basil, tomatoes, parsley, pumpkin and corn. And the corn has ears on it.

Nor are flowers — and now vegetables — the only living things that respond to Stefanie's green thumb. She's had "awesome success" using praying mantis as biological warfare against aphids. She buys the eggs at local nurseries and takes them home to hatch, then delivers them to the plants at The Bake Shop. Somehow, two of the thousands managed to stay behind in Stefanie's greenhouse.

"They've grown really large. I have two monster praying mantis in the greenhouse starting to look too big for me."

Stefanie had 53 dahlias this year. The tubers of some were so monstrous, she says, they wouldn't fit into their plastic containers. "I took a handsaw to them and cut them in half. Now I'm sitting on my deck and laughing at I don't know how many

containers. My husband thinks I should get rid of some." Good luck with that, Michael.

About the second week of September, it'll be time for Stefanie to begin to tear everything down and put it away for winter. That doesn't mean dumping out baskets and tossing everything into a garbage bag. Take just the begonias, for example:

"I sort the begonias by color and variety, break off the greenery, dig up the tubers, clean them and let them air-dry. I dust them with bulb dust and store them in onion netting. They hang from the ceiling in the root cellar like sausages."

They'll spend winter in 45-degree darkness, with a fan to keep dampness at bay.

And how does Stefanie feel about putting everything away for a few months?

"Winter is a good break. I have a front yard that I need to design. Since I'm self-taught, I don't know what I'm going to do."

Keep celebrating summer in Palmer

"Ack. It's almost over," read the e-mail from Brooke Heppinstall of WoolWood Studio & Gardens in Palmer. "What happened to summer?! Let's see, weed, pot, weed, plant, weed... is it September yet?"

OK, maybe a gentle way of putting it is that summer is winding down. But the fun isn't over yet, at least not from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday at the Tree & Shrub Fair put on by WoolWood and Stonehill Gardens.

The fair includes art activities such as painting with flower petals; turning chunks of alder and birch into cartoon faces, with bits of wood or washers or nuts for eyes and wire for hair; children's gardening activities; propagation and pruning demonstrations; end-of-season plant sales; and a gift drawing. Not to mention a scavenger hunt that requires finding 20 living things, such as plants, parts of plants and even bugs. Activities (except for plant sales) are free.

Stonehill's downtown Palmer location will hand out free wild mint slushies all day. How many chances do you get to try a mint slushy, let alone a wild mint slushy? Sally Koppenberg, owner of Stonehill Gardens, says the wild mint tastes like it has honey in it, it's so soft-flavored.

(Heppinstall and Koppenberg write "The Dirt Divas" gardening column for the Frontiersman newspaper.)

WoolWood Studio & Gardens and Stonehill Gardens are off Huntley Road near the Old Glenn Highway. For directions, call 1-907-746-3606 or 1-907-745-7071.

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