

## **Member Spotlight: Karen DesJarlais**



My husband Joe and I have lived in Menasha for 40 years now. Having established relationships and connections makes it easy to like living here. Our two children grew up and went to school here and I think the community has an interesting mix with a lot to offer in every respect. It's where our six grandchildren come to visit.

I worked beside my mother in our huge garden on the dairy farm where we lived and worked in Manitowoc County. Growing was always a much discussed topic since farm crops were our livelihood and growing food for the family was the norm. Peas and beans were some of the first things I planted when I was about five because the seeds were large and I could be trusted to space them as I had been instructed. Planting corn, oats or wheat, bailing hay, harvesting corn and grains were jobs I enjoyed with my dad since I was the major tractor driver on the fields from about age ten. I loved picking raspberries with my dad.

My mom was a wonderful cook who would feed thrashing crews amazing meals. Sometimes I helped with those. Mostly though, I was outside not inside. I was always intrigued when people would rave about the flowers my mom grew and would be engaged in flower bed tours around the yard. She was big on geraniums and famous for growing African Violets.

I took the master gardening classes because I wanted to grow things as well as my mom, not realizing that the soft, fertile, well manured soil was far superior to the clay in which I labor. But as I learn more, I'm doing better! I loved bringing her flowers when she was no longer planting and she is the reason that I like giving flowers to anyone who I think would enjoy them. In a book I found a note in my mom's handwriting that said, "Beautiful gardens are not made by sipping lemonade in the shade." Don't we know that! Annual asters were one of my favorite growing up flowers and I still plant them if I can find them.

I'm pretty happy with the vegetables that are ripening this summer in my new raised bed. Best tomatoes ever so far with the help of good soil, compost and regular watering. I have high hopes for even better rhubarb next year.

I like the gardening gloves that we sell. They help me pull weeds more easily and really do save my hands. My favorite garden tool is a three pronged long handled claw that makes lifting undesirables out of the soil easier. This is the first year we've had to deal with deer as vegetable eaters so we've raised the fence higher.

Probably the strangest thing I ever planted was cardoon. It was definitely a conversation piece but I wish I had known that it was edible.

My daughter has a nice sized garden and some of the grandchildren do plant and pick with me which I hope will generate a lifelong interest for them.

An enlightening and one of the most entertaining garden books that I enjoyed a long time ago is Gene Logsdon's The Contrary Farmer's Invitation to Gardening. He's wise, introspective and poetic.

You might not know that I played B flat contrabass clarinet in high-school and college band. Once I was "asked to leave" or you could say thrown out of a closed union meeting when I was a very green newspaper photographer. Film was confiscated. The editor who made that assignment said, "They wouldn't do anything to a woman," when I told him what happened. I was pretty sure they would have if I had not left willingly. I wrote and did video and interviews for a cable TV show for 17 years.

If money, time or courage was no object, I'd like to spend some time in Tibet with Buddhist monks. My favorite vacations---with kids Singapore, Bali and camping,---without kids Hawaii and camping.