

Gardening at its Best

By Zelpha Boyd, Gallatin Empire Garden Club Member

Imagine growing a garden at an elevation of 6,000 feet! But that's just what Rikki and Jon Scott and Roger Williams are doing in Virginia City. Their gardens, side by side on the south slope of Boot Hill overlooking the historic city, are demonstrating just what can be done.

Last Wednesday was a perfect day for traveling over the hill from Bozeman. The Tobacco Root Garden Club sponsored a pizza party and tours of gardens in the area—both splendid activities for a beautiful fall day.

Some innovative garden practices help make these gardens, not only possible, but very productive. First there are the six foot solid fences to keep out unwanted wildlife and the wind. Rikki says it also helps keep in the heat. Her greenhouse provides another space for protecting plants, especially in early spring and late fall. The greens, onions, squash, asparagus, tomatoes, and various herbs growing there, love the more controlled climate. I was surprised to see that the top, side fiberglass panels had been removed.

“It was getting too hot in there,” Rikki said. “Our sun is so intense in the summer the interior becomes like an oven.” She'll put the panels back in place as the weather becomes cooler, extending the growing season far into fall.

Roger uses many of the same gardening techniques in his garden. He has a ventilation fan in his greenhouse controlled with a thermostat, for consistent cooling. In yet another garden, where the soil is like clay, the potatoes were planted on top of the ground, and covered with a thick layer of straw. Harvesting will simply consist of pulling away the mulch and gathering the produce—an idea borrowed from Ruth Stout's book, *HOW TO GARDEN WITHOUT AN ACHING BACK*.

Another proven idea—growing plants in raised beds, large pots or barrels. These plants are less susceptible to frost, because the cold air tends to move downward, moving the frost away. The Scotts and Williams grow a good portion of their own food and have enough to market at the Farm to Fork Farmer's market in Ennis. They hope to become a learning center for others who want to engage in growing their own food.

After the garden tours, the Garden Club members enjoyed a homemade pizza lunch. Each member brought favorite pizza toppings and made a pizza using dough that Jon had made. Jon had fired up his huge outdoor brick oven ahead of time, and baked each one to perfection. It was a delight to sample all the different varieties of this lunch time favorite.

The trip over the hill indeed proved rewarding—a chance to become reacquainted with friends, enjoy an outdoor lunch—in September!—and learn a few more things about gardening.