

Garden Farmstand in Flagstaff in CMGA Annual Garden Tour

By Sarah Edmonds



The Coconino Master Gardener Association's annual tour of local gardens is on Saturday, August 9, 10am-4pm. One of the gardens on the tour belongs to Julie McDonald.

Julie got her love of gardening from her grandmother and her father. Her grandmother, who was already 84 years old when Julie was born, put all her kids through college selling vegetables grown in her garden on the corner of Park and Santa Fe here in Flagstaff. When Julie was 5 years old, her dad took her and a pumpkin she grew to Foodtown Market (where Beaver St. Brewery is now) and that was the first vegetable she sold!

Julie's love of plants continued as she got older. "When I was 7, I was walking with my friends along the Rio de Flag in Coconino Estates. Someone had thrown some orange daylilies over the fence. I took them home and planted them and took such good care of them. I'm still selling those daylilies!"

Julie's garden is on Cooper Drive in Cheshire at a home she purchased in 1977. With four children, she had a front yard planted with grass, which became the neighborhood football field. But as her children grew, she decided to slowly cut back on the lawn and expand her vegetable and perennial area, which she did by laying cardboard down on the grass to kill it, covering it with manure, and eventually planting squash, rhubarb, asparagus and perennials.

Julie has a seasonal farmstand at her house. "When I turned 50, I wanted to do something special. I started with a little cart at the edge of the driveway. My kids all laughed at me. I hung the first 2 dollars I made on the refrigerator for a year."

"Then in June 2009, the newspaper came out and wanted to do an article. I was on the front page of the July 4 issue that they gave away. That really just skyrocketed the farmstand. Then I started doing the email list and people started coming from all over town. My favorite thing is I've met so many nice people."

Now, instead of a self-serve vegetable cart, Julie periodically announces upcoming plant sales to her email list of over 700 people. Her main specialties are selling bouquets, houseplants, and outdoor plants.

"Everything I sell I've tested. I want people to be successful in their gardens. There is nothing more miserable than failure. So I'm very careful to only sell things that will grow here. That's why I wrote the book, "Farm Your Front Yard" in 2010. Then I redid it in 2014, and I called it, "High Altitude Gardening."

Being new to Flagstaff in 2017, I didn't know what would really grow well here. I had some early fails after buying plants at local nurseries. But after meeting Julie at the Flagstaff Christian Fellowship Christmas craft show, the next spring most Saturday mornings I was at her farmstand, buying bare root peonies, day lilies, iris, asters, and seeds like sweet peas and picotee cosmos. Instructions for planting are lovingly offered to each customer by Julie.

I asked Julie about her favorite plants to grow in Flagstaff. "Whatever's blooming at the time is my favorite. Daffodils, iris, peonies, daylilies, squash, asparagus, rhubarb, Lenten rose; I like all of them really. I like cosmos, nasturtiums, and sweet peas. I prefer perennials. Fire spinner ice plant is a newer one."

She warns people not to go out into the woods and start digging up plants to bring home. “Lupine won’t grow in town and same with Indian paintbrush.” Some popular plants in Flagstaff can be invasive, so she doesn’t sell them. Another difficulty she sees for area gardeners is dealing with deer, elk, rabbits, chipmunks, and squirrels. “I really like to help people with what the animals won’t eat,” such as peonies, rhubarb, iris, and daffodils. “They’ll eat all your tulips and daylilies.”

At the August 9th garden tour, Julie will be selling her books; easy to grow houseplants such as mona lavender, angel wing begonia, geraniums, and prayer plants; and high-end fancy daylilies. Come on out and enjoy viewing the nine gardens on the tour. Volunteers and the gardeners themselves will be available to answer all your questions. Tickets are available online now at CMGA2025.eventbrite.com or at Warner’s Nursery on August 9 from 9-noon.

Sarah Edmonds earned a Home Horticulture Certificate from University of Arizona Cooperative Extension in 2024.