

Gertrude's Garden in Madison County: Love of flowers blossoms into business

Nell Luter Floyd, Special to Mississippi Clarion Ledger Published 4:30 a.m. CT July 22, 2020

Most days, Julie Cado is up at dawn and at work in Gertrude's Garden.

"I get a cup of coffee and hit it so I can get as much done as possible before the heat sets in," she said.

The garden, which is better described as a flower farm, sits behind the Madison County farmhouse-style home where Julie lives with her husband, David Cado.

The garden is named in honor of Julie's maternal grandmother, the late Gertrude Buckley of Oak Vale, a Mississippi community that is south of Prentiss where Julie grew up.

"I get my love of flowers from her," said Julie, a self-taught gardener with boundless energy. "She passed away from Alzheimer's several years ago."



Julie Cado shows off a picture-perfect zinnia grown at Gertrude's Garden in Madison County. (Photo: Nell Luter Floyd/Special to Clarion Ledger)

Flowers shifting into agricultural crop

Gertrude's Garden (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Farm/Gertrudes-Garden-MS-112954173777126/>) is part of the field-to-vase movement that falls in line with the rising number of cut-flower growers in the state, said Donna Yowell, founder of the 3-year-old, 2,500-member group Flower Growers of Mississippi.

The group, [found on Facebook at Flower Growers of Mississippi \(https://www.facebook.com/msflowercoop/\)](https://www.facebook.com/msflowercoop/), provides education via Zoom classes and distributes bulbs when available.

"Eighty percent of flowers sold in America are imported and 90% of that can be grown in Mississippi," she said. "We're gradually shifting flower growing into an agricultural crop. It's a great job creation opportunity for a lot of people and one that fills a market need."

The onset of the novel coronavirus and supply challenges have made it difficult for florists to receive flowers, and that's opened the market for Mississippi growers, she said. "We've had florists call and want to buy locally grown flowers," she said.

Farm boxes, new patrons: [Flora finds ways to flourish amid pandemic \(/story/magnolia/upside/2020/06/03/flora-mississippi-growers-restaurants-unite-pandemic/5194084002/\)](https://www.magnolia.com/upside/2020/06/03/flora-mississippi-growers-restaurants-unite-pandemic/5194084002/)

Wondering just how popular cut flowers are?

"Eighty percent of the population buys flowers," Yowell said.

Gertrude's Garden took root in the fall of 2019 after the Cadoses tried gardening in a traditional way with dirt rows. Rains and deer proved problematic.

"We decided if we're going to do this, we're going to do it right," said David, a power specialist at the Stuart C. Irby Co.



David Cado and his wife, Julie, enjoy their work at Gertrude's Garden in Madison County. (Photo: Nell Luter Floyd/Special to Clarion Ledger)

36 raised beds for flowers, more beds for vegetables

With that decision, he built 12 raised beds that each measure 16-feet-by-4-feet from treated lumber, filled them with a mix of aged gin trash and Pro-Mix soil and added a drip irrigation system that not only supplies water but also fertilizer. Along the way, he added an almost 9-foot tall fence to keep out deer and paths of crushed limestone to keep feet dry and clean.

Gertrude's Garden, which occupies about half an acre, includes 36 raised beds for growing cut flowers. Additional beds contain vegetables such as heirloom tomatoes, squash, eggplant, okra, peppers, cucumbers and peas that the Cadoses grow for their use and share with friends.

12 women entrepreneurs under one roof: [Signature Gifts drawing customers in Ridgeland \(/story/magnolia/upside/2020/07/01/signature-gifts-women-vendors-township-at-colony-park-ridgeland/3231215001/\)](https://www.magnolia.com/upside/2020/07/01/signature-gifts-women-vendors-township-at-colony-park-ridgeland/3231215001/)

There's room for the garden to expand – and that's in the works.

"We're planning to add two more rows and a full greenhouse," said David, no doubt a man who likes a project.

"I'd like to add hydrangeas in the shady area at the back and a couple of rows of roses and peonies," said Julie.

Hobby planted seeds for bigger venture

The garden started as a hobby that would offer relaxation after work, she said. "Then I fell in love with planting seeds you can't find here."

Julie, who delights in reading and learning new things about gardening, opts to start most of the flowers from seeds in a small greenhouse that has a door over which hangs the sign "Our Happy Place."

She collects seeds from blossoms and saves them for the proper growing season and she places orders for varieties of flowers she has not grown before from numerous seed catalogs. She recently received dahlia tubers from the Flower Growers of Mississippi.

"It's amazing how it goes from a seed to a beautiful flower," said Julie, who wants to eventually develop new varieties of flowers.

At the start of July, Gertrude's Garden was profuse with zinnias of all hues, purple lace flowers, sky blue delphinium and yarrow in white and pastel colors. The floral mix also included ageratum in pink and purple and cockscomb in yellow, hot pink and burgundy, with sunflowers presiding over it all.

When the garden began to abundantly yield, Julie enjoyed the blossoms but faced a dilemma: What should she do with all the flowers she had grown?

Nothing like a fresh farm bouquet

A member of the flower guild at the Chapel of the Cross, Julie provided blossoms for the church to use on the altar.

She gave away flowers to friends. "I'd sent out a text to people I knew and say, 'Come get flowers,'" she said.

Jan Hogue of Madison, a member of the Chapel of the Cross who is also a flower guild member, happily responded to one of those texts.



A bouquet from Gertrude's Garden in Madison County is a glorious mix. (Photo: Nell Luter Floyd/Special to Clarion Ledger)

"When you get a fresh farm bouquet from Julie it looks like you've just gone through a meadow and picked it," she said. "It's all loved and nurtured."

Hogue once ordered from a floral supplier blue tweedia, a flower which is imported from Israel, to use in an arrangement for a baptism at the Chapel of the Cross.

Shaping the kind of life she wants: [Pottery business offers more than artistic freedom \(story/magnolia/upside/2020/06/18/pottery-business-madison-county-woman-jonni-webb-jr-webb-pottery/3139331001/\)](https://www.magnolia.com/upside/2020/06/18/pottery-business-madison-county-woman-jonni-webb-jr-webb-pottery/3139331001/)

When Julie learned how much Hogue liked the flower, she planted it.

"I love a challenge," Julie said. "It was exciting to see it grow. I'll continue to plant it."

Julie turned to Cheryl Welch of Madison, a member of the Chapel of the Cross and a flower guild member, and Patricia Hathcock of Jackson, a member of the [Garden Club of Jackson \(https://www.gardenclubofjackson.com/\)](https://www.gardenclubofjackson.com/), to help get the word out about Gertrude's Garden. They invited the Jackson Garden Club to visit.

"They were interested and had lots of questions," said Welch, a member of the Garden Club of Jackson. "They were especially interested in how Julie starts everything from seed."



Julie Cado holds her granddaughter, Annie Parker, while her daughter, Georgia Parker, arranges a bouquet of flowers grown at Gertrude's Garden in Madison County. (Photo: Nell Luter Floyd/Special to Clarion Ledger)

Daughter joins the business

Welch and Hathcock assisted with early pop-up sales at the farm, a job that Julie's daughter, Georgia Parker of Madison, now handles. She updates [the site on Instagram \(https://www.instagram.com/gertrudesgardenllc/\)](https://www.instagram.com/gertrudesgardenllc/) and [Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Farm/Gertrudes-Garden-MS-112954173777126/\)](https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Farm/Gertrudes-Garden-MS-112954173777126/) about when pop-ups are scheduled, wraps bouquets in craft paper and twine, keeps up with the accounting and handles other details.

"Mom grows a lot of cool, funky flowers that you can't get at the grocery store," said Georgia Parker, a stay-at-home mother with a 9-month-old daughter, Annie. "People like the idea of farm fresh, whether it's vegetables or flowers, and want to know who grew them and the story behind them."

Gertrude's Garden Flower Farm has also sold bouquets at [Fresh at Five](https://www.mainstreetclintonms.com/events/fresh-five) (<https://www.mainstreetclintonms.com/events/fresh-five>), a farmer's market from 5-7 p.m. each Tuesday through August in Olde Towne Clinton.

"I did the first two and will go back," Julie said. "It's fun to sell something that makes people happy."

Julie, who teaches guided studies class for students in grade one through five at Madison-Ridgeland Academy, said the garden has been an oasis the last few months while she taught from home.

"It's like therapy for me," she said.

She made history as West Point graduate: [Here's what Mississippi woman is doing now \(/story/news/2020/06/24/first-african-american-woman-graduate-west-point-mississippi-kathleen-terry-makupson-macrame/5342071002/\)](https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2020/06/24/first-african-american-woman-graduate-west-point-mississippi-kathleen-terry-makupson-macrame/5342071002/)

A graduate of Mississippi State University who worked as a personal trainer for 12 years, Julie also works as a Realtor for Rosemary Stovall Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Gateway Real Estate. "It's good extra income that helps me do this," she said, referring to gardening.

Perhaps the most satisfying part about the garden is meeting people who appreciate flowers and working with her daughter, Julie said.

"In the busy world that we live in, it allows us time to spend together that we might not otherwise," she said. "With Georgia being part of this, I like to think it might be something my granddaughter, Annie, might want to continue one day. I hope it will be a family business for a long time."

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