

## Billie Lou and Bob Carson: Maintaining a high quality of life

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Billie Lou, left, and Bob Carson pose by their swimming pool fed by a waterfall.

**Name:** Billie Lou (retired dental hygienist/paraprofessional for preschoolers with disabilities) and Bob Carson (retired teacher/administrator/coach; director of Children Services Board; development director at Toledo Christian School), living in Sylvania Township.

**Garden specs:** We have several beds in our 3/4-acre lot: two train gardens and miniature villages named for our grandchildren (Lake Lauren, Justin's farm, Landon is chief of the Indian village, and Carson is mayor and ticket-office agent). A memorial garden is for my mother: she loved deer and we have the deer that was on her lawn surrounded by plantings, a stone, and some of her ashes. Flower gardens and a small barn (we found the plans in a

magazine) for garden equipment. It's enhanced by four water features: beautiful stone waterfalls (a large one spills into the swimming pool where the diving board was), streams, and ponds. We're fortunate to have our own well with excellent water. It's all enclosed by a wrought-iron fence. People who visit us think it looks like a beautiful park.

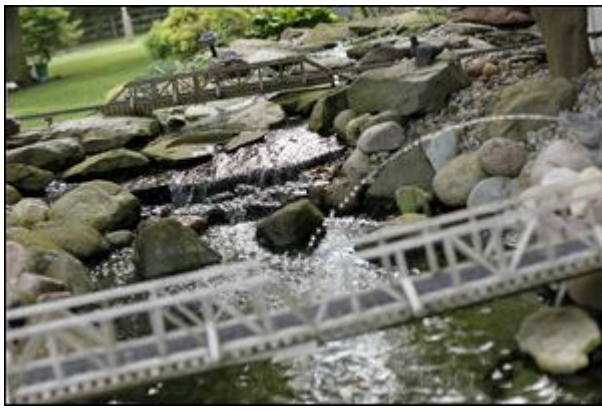
**When did you start gardening?** Bob: We celebrated an anniversary about 40 years ago at a lodge on Lake Michigan that had a stream running in front of it and a bridge leading to the entrance, and Billie said, 'Can you do this?' I had 10 tons of stone delivered and dug out the stream and waterfall in front of the house. I've since expanded it to about 33-yards-long. It's been a real learning experience. We keep netting over the pond because a great blue heron snatches the fish. I love landscape architecture and do the designing, and Billie Lou does most of the upkeep. Every year I have a project.

**What do you grow?** Everything from ornamental trees, water plants, shrubs, annuals, and perennials. A lush lawn that Billie Lou spends almost six hours mowing. Window boxes, many blue pots, and yard sculptures. Billie Lou: Every year he buys me [garden art].

**Favorite plant:** Billie Lou: Geraniums, azalea, wild ferns, roses, many hostas. I plant 10 to 12 flats of impatiens but this year they didn't survive due to infected seed. I really miss their color.

**Give us a tip:** One needs to give annuals a great deal of loving care.

**Hours spent gardening per week:** Billie Lou: 40 to 50 or so. Watering the pots takes three to four hours, including weekly fertilizing. I don't sit down during the day. Bob: 20-25.



Two model rail road bridges allow a train to run through out the Carson's front yard garden in Sylvania Township, Ohio.

**Annual expense:** \$500 plus; more when we undertake significant projects. Bob: I have way to much money in this.

**Challenges:** It can be very time consuming. Before starting a garden one needs to determine the amount of maintenance needed to keep the garden attractive and healthy.

**I'm proud of:** The beauty and neatness of our property.

**What I've gotten out of gardening:** As seniors (we're 83 and 80, married 56 years), it is important that one remains mentally and physically active to maintain a high quality of

life. Gardening is one of the major reasons why we enjoy our retirement. It helps us use creative skills, see the rewards of our labor, gives satisfaction, and keeps mind and body active. It keeps one out of "the rocking chair." In winter we work out almost daily, follow our grandchildren's events, are big supporters of UT's men's and women's sports, are very socially active, and attend church regularly.

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