



Here: Ready for the Fourth of July, Greg Grant's restored Emanis House in East Texas sports Old Glory in its "dog trot" entryway. Cannas and pink 'John Fanic' phlox fill the summer garden.

Inset, right: Before the restoration: The dog trot breezeway had been closed in and the ceilings had been lowered.

# GARDENING FOR LOVE

*A Texas horticulturist restores his great-great grandparents' home and garden*

Greg Grant

One of the best garden writers the South has ever known was Elizabeth Lawrence of North Carolina. Among the books she wrote, my very favorite is *Gardening for Love*, which was published posthumously in 1987. It's about her corre-

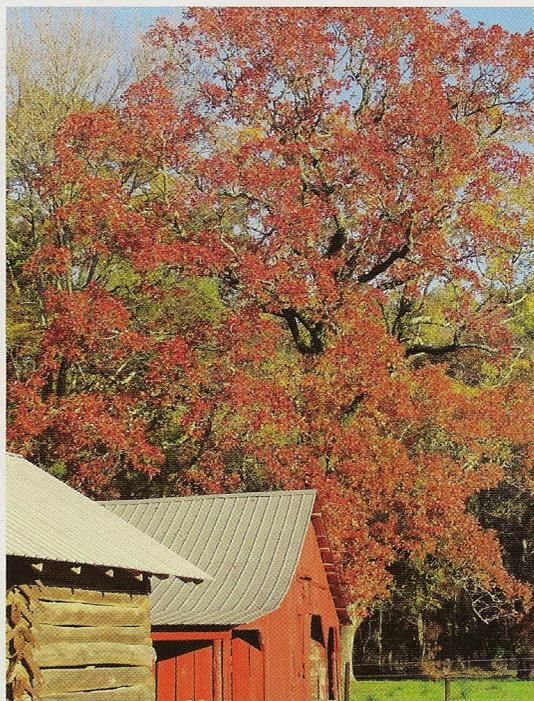
spondence with country gardeners who advertise their flowers in the Southern market bulletins and who, in her words, "garden for love." The book is filled with stories, local names, and proper identifications for numerous pass-along Southern plants. Pass-along plants are

basically "hand-me-downs" – plants passed from one generation to another, or from one friendly gardener to the next.

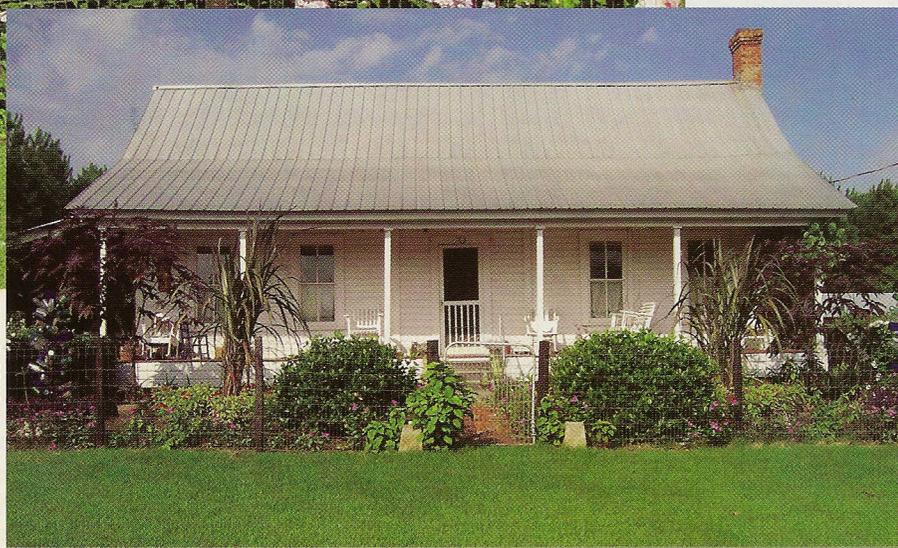
As the "baby boy" among four children, each a year apart, I'm quite familiar with hand-me-downs. I naturally learned



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Rare fall color of a post oak provides the backdrop for the restored corn crib and barn.



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to live with numerous discarded items from my two older brothers. However, my most prized pass-alongs didn't come from my brothers, but from my maternal grandparents instead.

My mother's parents were Georgia Marquette Emanis and Rebel Eloy Emanis. Everybody called her "Coot," and he went by Eloy. I simply called them Grandmother and Pappaw. I loved them dearly and spent as much time with them at their old farmhouse in Deep East Texas as I could. They

were as poor as could be, but I certainly never knew it. The best days of my childhood were spent in that little Arcadia community. Appropriately, Arcadia was from Greek mythology and became synonymous with heaven on earth. It certainly was for me. My grandparents' old house once belonged to my grandmother's grandparents, and ended up being passed on to me. I promised my grandmother I would look after it and will go to my grave doing so.

When my great-aunt and -uncle owned the house in the 1940s, they closed the open "dog run" through the middle and lowered the ceilings to make the rooms easier to cool. After Arcadia got electricity in 1949, folks considered these vernacular "dog trot" houses with open breezeways obsolete. Of course, the dogtrot houses were constructed to tolerate the long, hot summers in the South and at one time were a dominant floor plan in the southeastern U.S. Unfortunately, few of them remain. And yes, dogs did run and trot through them.

From the time I was a kid, I planned to restore my grandparent's old house to its condition when my great-great grandparents lived in it. In 2010 my dream finally came true. In addition to opening the dogtrot back up and raising the ceilings back to their original height, I removed a lean-to room on the back, replaced aluminum storm windows that had been added on the back and sides, and buried the distracting power lines that lead to the house.

Of course, I was born a gardener, and I live to grow both edibles and



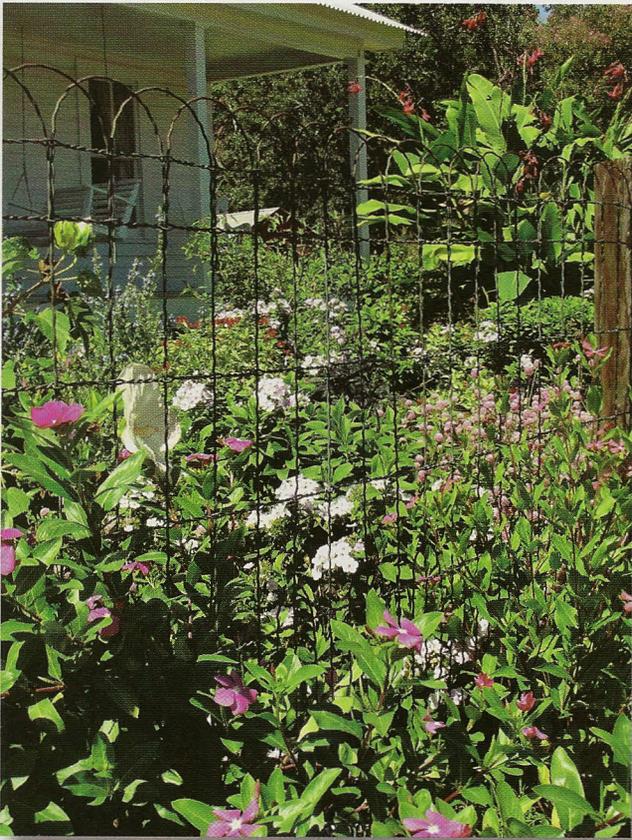
**Top:** Picturesque peony poppies flank the big, open porch.

**Bottom:** Greg's nostalgic plantings include a 'Peggy Martin' climber, the vigorous rose famed for its survival story following Hurricane Katrina.

ornamentals. It was at this very house where my Pappaw taught me how to grow vegetables and my Grandmother taught me the names of the wildflowers and pass-along plants. So, of course, I needed a new garden to go with the

restored house. I had lived in the house several decades and had had numerous temporary gardens before, but I always knew I eventually wanted a "permanent" old-fashioned cottage garden in front and a "kitchen garden" out back for good things to eat.

Long before the house was restored, I propagated cuttings from a favorite lilac-purple crape myrtle at a nearby homeplace and planted an alleé of them leading up to the house. I figured as long as I had a big open porch running through the middle of my house, I might as well accentuate it. Originally I planted them twice too dense and later removed every other one so they'd have room to mature. Of course, I never top them (and never will) and will allow them to grow into the typical picturesque crape myrtle shape. I also framed each side of the house with two pink crape myrtles propagated from the old Emanis homeplace in the woods up the road. One reason I chose these two old *indica* crape myrtle



*Double-loop ornamental fencing and beds overflowing with warm-season annuals and perennials recall the grace of an earlier time.*

they taught me. My little kitchen garden in back is just being finished, and it features my lifetime collection of self-made tire planters filled with potting soil and connected by drip irrigation. I grow berries, asparagus, tomatoes, peppers, green beans, cucumbers, spinach, herbs, and assorted other culinary delights there. It's kind of tacky, but in East Texas that's a compliment.

selections is that, unlike many others, they both survived the zero-degree temperatures of the early 1980s. I wanted them to be permanent as well.

The relatively small front garden is composed mostly of Texas-tough plants that I've developed. I use them for cutting stock for our famous annual Stephen F. Austin Gardens plant sales. Although I do allow for a few reseeding annuals, my cottage garden is composed primarily of warm-season perennials. It's mostly a summer butterfly and hummingbird garden that I can enjoy while sitting on the porch. After shoulder surgery, two neck surgeries, back surgery, and hip surgery, I figured I'd better get some things in the ground that didn't need replacing. I also have a color theme that excludes yellow. It's not that I have anything against yellow; quite the opposite. After my beloved golden jonquils finish blooming in the early spring, I banish the color for the rest of the year. In my mind, no other plant can do the color justice after that show of beauty and fragrance.

I still grow row-crop vegetables on one side of the house, the same place my grandparents grew them. I still make my rows with a tiller, furrow irrigate, and grow yummy peas and corn just like

Behind the house, I planted eight acres of pine trees and will spend the rest of my life recreating an early East Texas open pine forest. My Pappaw was quite an outdoorsman and loved the woods, so I've dubbed it the "Rebel Eloy Emanis Pine Savanna and Bird Sanctuary." To encourage native grasses and an open understory that attracts pine savanna species like pine warblers and brown-headed nuthatches, I conduct an annual control burn and regularly thin the pines to allow in more sunlight. The evergreen forest also serves as a dark green curtain behind my old family home and cottage garden.

There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about how much I loved my grandparents and how much they loved me. And having the unique opportunity to live my life in their very house and grow roots in the same soil they did, is literally a dream come true. It's a true labor of love and I'm forever grateful. 

*About the author: Greg Grant is a horticulturist at Stephen F. Austin Gardens in Nacogdoches, author of Growing Fruits and Vegetable in Texas, and co-author of Heirloom Gardening in the South.*

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