

Gardener spreads love of blooms

By Diane Gale Andreassi / CORRESPONDENT

Robert Christ makes Redford a little more beautiful one dahlia at a time.

Right now he has more than 40 of these tender tubers in purples, oranges mixed with yellow, magenta, red and a rainbow of other colors adorning his front, side and back gardens on Ross Drive across from Western Golf and Country Club. Even a hedge, that actually belongs to his neighbor, but abuts his driveway has been turned into a beautiful row of green and colorful examples of his green thumb.

The recently-named chairman of the Redford Beautification Commission has created a mini paradise that also features purple and white Rose of Sharon that make a perfect backdrop through a window by his dining room table; Black-Eyed Susan, bee balm in red and purple; impatiens; a showy hibiscus with blooms as large as a hand; lilies; asters; Japanese anemone that look woody and artificial; mums and so much more including a bountiful vegetable garden with tomatoes and squash.

There's one lone sunflower among all the other planted beauties and Christ (pronounced Criss) explains that a bird must have carried the seed from one of his four bird feeders and dropped it on the ground. Christ let it remain, even though it wasn't part of his design.



He's hoping his planting ways will catch on with other Redford residents through a program, "The Best Yard Award." One front yard will be chosen and the owner will receive a plaque announcing the land has received the "2010 Best Yard Award." Call Christ (pronounced Criss) at (313) 914-9209 or go to prodahliabc@gmail.com by Aug. 15 to nominate a yard for this award.

"The nice part about this program is that it encourages other neighbors to try a little harder to beautify their front yard," Christ said. "I would like to give credit to Janet Watson who has been chairwoman (of the beautification commission) for the past 10 years. Also, Fran Mikula, treasurer, and Barb Schenden, secretary, have been on the commission for eight years and are very dedicated in their various responsibilities. Plus, we all (nine beautification commissioners and other volunteers) participate in planting flowers around the township building and community center."

Easily looking 20 years younger than his 80 years, Christ squats to the ground to touch the leaves and tell a story about the near death of a favorite plant, a Pinot Noir dahlia.

(continued)

Bending, pulling, lifting and all the other calisthenics required to keep his lovely garden lovely is great exercise, he said.

There's always something in bloom in Christ's garden — from spring when the crocus, tulips and lilies take center stage to summer when Black-Eyed Susan, bee balm, the large faced and showy hibiscus and Rose of Sharon are the focal point and then in fall the mums and asters are colorful— Chris made sure of that.



He can spend more and more time with the garden that demands constant care weeding, pruning and staking, since he retired in 2006 after seven years at St. Mary Hospital working in various capacities including driving a shuttle bus, manning the phones and making bank deposits. Before that he owned Executive Office Supply in Farmington for 30 years.

Now he can direct more attention to the garden that

continuously seems to expand. He fertilizes his plants with organic materials, because he said, he doesn't like chemicals.

Christ is known to share his dahlia tubers and any other perennials from his garden. Likewise, he attends plant exchanges and picks up the flowers he wants, mostly new dahlias.

He prefers dahlias to other perennials because they're not invasive — they won't quickly take over an entire area spreading beyond control.

His dahlia's need special care, because in the late fall the tubers underground need to be dug-up and kept in a warm place and then replanted in the spring.

Many Redford flower lovers may have seen Christ's flowers on the 2007 or 2009 Redford garden walks. If you would like to have a garden considered for the 2011 garden walk call Christ until May 1, 2011.

Standing in his garden separated from his neighbors by a link fence, he explains the owner followed his lead and has added beautiful flower beds and interesting garden accessories throughout her yard.

“She told me I was her mentor,” Christ said.

When asked what the secret was to a beautiful garden, Christ said, “There is no secret. It's work. I've always been a gardener. And once I retired I extended it to much bigger.”

“I wish I had a bigger yard,” he said adding, however, with a laugh that his wife, Doreen says, the current lot is quite big enough.

He says he can't say exactly how much time he puts into his gardening, but estimates it is a couple of hours a day—sometimes more and sometimes less. The spring and fall are the busiest times.

When it comes to gardening—nature dictates what you do and when. This year's rainy and humid weather has kept Christ out the yard at times. But, when he can, you can expect to see him in the dirt.

“I feel the best when I garden, physically and emotionally.”

