



GARDENS

Farm roots: Dianne Noland knows her way around a garden



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BLUE MOUND — Dianne Noland was born with more than just a green thumb. Maybe a better way to describe her hands at birth would be muddy.

As a University of Illinois horticulture instructor and host of WILL-TV's "Mid-America Gardener," Noland knows her way around a garden. She was born into a long line of farmers and gardeners.

"I was no older than 5 or 6 when I started planting vegetable gardens with Grandpa Charlie," she said. Her grandfather, Charlie Noland, owned and operated the family farm in Blue Mound. The farm is still worked by her father and brothers.

But how does her garden grow?

One might think that with a career involving flowers and gardening, Noland may have a small or subtle garden, if she had one at all.

"But it spills out into everything," Noland said of her life. "Flowers are God's gift to me."

She lives with her husband on 33 acres, and natural wilderness occupies 18 of them. "We have minimally cleared trails in the woods," she said. "We want to keep it natural."

Natural is a common theme in her gardens, and Noland uses no-till gardening throughout. "My husband will till for me when I need it," she said.

Instead, she uses compost from the large mounds throughout her property in all of her gardens. "I keep the ground covered until I plant it," she said. "I just like the way it keeps the soil moisture in."

Noland will intersperse flowers and vegetables to lure birds and butterflies into the garden. "The flowers bring the pollinators," she said.

Many of the gardens are fenced, with old gates and wood to keep her five chickens from eating the seeds.

Although Noland and her family are the self-proclaimed "outdoorsy" type, she has found her way indoors and in front of a camera. She has been the host of the TV show Mid-America Gardener for 14 years. "I was also on the very first show in 1992 as a guest," she said.

To be on television or in front of a classroom, a person needs to be outgoing, a trait not

typically used for a gardener, but Noland has never been the quiet type. “She never met a stranger,” said her mother, Erma Noland. “All of the kids were full of life.”

For her love of plants and gardening, Noland gives credit to her childhood. “I think having a farm background set the stage for my horticulture career and a good life.”

Her earliest memories were focused on gardens. While in her kindergarten Sunday school class, Noland and her classmates were invited to the teacher’s backyard. “We walked two by two to Mrs. McQueen’s house in the back gate, and she had all these flowers in the backyard,” she said. “That was my first memory.”

“She was always interested in flowers and gardening,” said her father, Neil Noland.

As a child growing up on a farm, many found themselves in the field. Noland and her brothers David, Duane and Dennis were often found working with their father. “She did her part as a child growing up,” her father said.

“She always held her own with her three brothers,” added her mother. “She didn’t seem to mind she was the only girl.”

Before she left for college, Noland lived in Switzerland, which borders Italy, as an American Field Student. At 17, she knew only one question in Italian: “Posso aiutarvi a scegliere i pomodori?” or “May I help you pick tomatoes?”

“On Grandpa’s farm, you tried to be self-sustaining,” she said. “The family I was matched with (overseas) was the same way.”

Noland was able to take what she learned in Switzerland to the University of Illinois. “I learned the scientific names while over there,” she said.

She is now an instructor at her alma mater, teaching floral design and perennials for the landscape.

“I really appreciate having a farm background,” she said. “I am so small town, but I did fine at the U of I.”

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