



# Regatta Gardens

Coombs BC



# Land ho!

In 1986, the future home of Coombs' Regatta Gardens was almost entirely covered with trees, dense underbrush, and other people's junk. That year, Barry and Sylvia Neden set sail from Alberta with their three small children, purchased the 23-acre Vancouver Island property, and launched their farm. "There wasn't much to move to," recalls Sylvia Neden. "It was pretty bad."

Section by section, they removed and sold the timber, burned huge piles of underbrush and plant debris, and carted away 75 truckloads of trash to the dump.

And that was for the first three acres.

One year after purchasing the property, the Nedens planted their first vegetable garden, opened for two weeks, and made enough money to spur their farming efforts. Seven years after that, they had finished clearing, and were farming, the first three acres—the same amount of land they continue to farm for crops today. "Our philosophy was, 'Why clear more land when you're not making this one productive?'" explains Sylvia. "So rather than expanding and putting more investment in the farm, we intensified and improved what we did on those three acres."

And intensify they did. The Nedens now grow raspberries and strawberries, as well as vegetables such as corn, potatoes, beets, peas, beans, pickling cucumbers, carrots, herbs, rhubarb, and greenhouse tomatoes. The vegetables are mostly pre-ordered, and the berries are pre-ordered and you-pick. Any

extras are sold in the 60-year-old ivy-covered house the Nedens renovated for use as a market. On three more rough-cleared acres, the Nedens keep layer chickens, whose eggs they sell year round, and sheep which they raise for meat.

Right from the start, both Barry and Sylvia have also worked off the farm. Barry now works fulltime at a lumber company and Sylvia part-time as a medical receptionist in Qualicum Beach. Any free time they have, including evenings, weekends, and holidays, is spent working on the farm. Their lives are full steam ahead and show no signs of slowing down. In fact, the Nedens are bound to get even busier over the next few years when Sylvia completes her training to be a practical nurse.

So what makes them continue the race?

"We definitely like the way of life, the rural lifestyle," Sylvia replies. Although from a small-business perspective, she indicates that running the farm can be very tough, Sylvia does enjoy running the market and interacting with customers, as well as growing crops and raising animals. "And you have to like what you do otherwise you wouldn't be doing it," Sylvia stresses. "There's no way I'm going to be out there crawling around in the

weeds if it's not my cup of tea." Barry enjoys the challenge of growing the crops. "He also enjoys the animals a lot. When it's lambing season, he's just, 'Oh, we've got a lambing problem' and 'Boy, this is a big one, I don't know if we can get this one out'," laughs Sylvia.

After so many years, Regatta Gardens is very much rooted in the Neden family. "I was always proud as a mom at Thanksgiving dinner to have everything homegrown," Sylvia comments. "I know where our food is coming from, and the flavour is so much better." Sylvia and Barry's enthusiasm has rubbed off on their children, Daniel, Jennifer, and Laura. As a result of their experiences with the farm and market, Daniel is now studying commerce at Malaspina University-College, while Jennifer is studying agriculture at the University of Alberta. The youngest, Laura, works at the farm during the summer and plans to become both a lawyer and part-time farmer in the years to come.

Many trees are also firmly rooted in Regatta Gardens, or rather, in the farm's soil, but clearing the land is a storm the Nedens will weather in time. One thing's for sure: it may not all be smooth sailing for Barry and Sylvia, but that's certainly not going to stop them from plowing ahead.

## FARM FACTS

**Employed –**  
*seasonal: 7*  
*year-round: 0*

**Gross Farm Sales –**  
*\$30,000*

**Land Owned –**  
*23 acres*

**Land Leased –**  
*0 acres*