

A man and a woman are standing in a lush garden in front of a white house with horizontal siding. The man, on the left, has white hair and glasses, wearing a white polo shirt and blue jeans. The woman, on the right, has short brown hair and is wearing a white polo shirt and blue jeans. They are both smiling slightly. The garden is filled with various flowers, including pink and purple blooms in the foreground and yellow flowers to the right. The house behind them has a window with white trim.

LABOR OF LOVE

Landscaping firm grows from woman's
lifetime of gardening



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If you're trying to predict how good a job a landscaper will do on your property, just take a swing by their yard. If the beds are overgrown and the bushes need trimming, you might want to think twice about hiring them.

But if you've driven past the Gales Ferry yard of Linda and Bill Lillie, you've likely seen all you need to.

"My gardens change each year," says Linda, the founder of Sprigs & Twigs Landscapes, LLC. "I use my yard as a laboratory and experiment with different plants. Everything looks really good. I'm happy with them."

Since 1997, Linda has been designing, installing and maintaining the gardens of residences and businesses in the region. Two years ago, her husband, Bill, joined the company full time after retiring from his engineering job.

Dabbling in the field of flowers, plants and shrubs has been a part of Linda's life for as long as she can remember.

"Since I was a little kid, I loved being outside. I've always had a love for plants, but when I went to school I thought I wanted to be in chemistry. I later changed my major to botany," she says.

A large percentage of her clients are novice gardeners, but many have a genuine fear of

planting in their yard.

"Most of them have no idea what they want, they just know they want something," she says.

To help bring their ideas to life, the couple uses computer-generated layouts of clients' gardens, along with color photographs, to give them a visual image of what the finished product will look like. Bill used computers frequently during his career in the submarine business.

"This business was predominately hand drawings and colorized drawings. This made us much more creative and productive," he says. "We do a lot of designs in the course of a year and if we had to do them all by hand, we wouldn't be able to."

Their attention to detail is what helped Sprigs & Twigs be named one of 12 finalists for a national award. The company is vying for the Landscaper of the Year 2008 award from Total Landscape Care magazine. The annual program, sponsored by Case Construction Equipment, recognizes 12 noteworthy firms from across the country as the best in the landscaping industry. Only one will receive the top honor.

The magazine's editor in chief recently visited the Gales Ferry couple and spent the day with them as they visited job sites, worked on new designs and talked with clients.

"He went through every aspect of our business, from equipment to design. It was quite a day," says Bill.

Sprigs & Twigs has roughly 15 seasonal employees and only a handful year round. For them to go up against landscaping firms that gross up to \$8 million in annual sales is impressive in itself.

"We are really proud of what we do," says Bill. "We've done good jobs and have a tremendous reputation. We are honored to be a finalist. That is good enough for us."

In her previous career, when she wasn't working as a dental assistant, Linda spent countless hours in her own garden, perfecting the craft that she brings so effortlessly to each client.

"I learned through lots of lessons and lots of mistakes," she says. "If I put a plant that needed a lot of water in a dry area and tried to water it there, it didn't live. If I put a plant that needed a lot of sun in the shade and tried to make it grow, it didn't work."

"I've learned that Mother Nature always wins," she says.

JUST THE FACTS

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BEFORE, LEFT, AND AFTER PHOTOS OF WORK DONE BY BILL AND LINDA LILLIE (OPPOSITE PAGE) OF SPRIGS & TWIGS LANDSCAPES, LLC, BASED IN GALES FERRY. PHOTOS COURTESY OF SPRIGS & TWIGS

