

Gardening angel

With a prodigious straightforward st Barbara Hayes is c



Franklin dairy and beef producer Barbara Hayes uses vegetables from her acre-large garden to supply a weekly “friendship meal” that she cooks and delivers to several homebound, elderly residents of her community. Barbara uses her 10-year-old Earthway garden seeder to create even rows and consistent stands in her garden.

Story and photo by Mark E. Johnson

Thanks to an ornery bumblebee, the 13 elderly recipients of Barbara Hayes’ weekly “friendship meal” might have to go without fresh cucumbers for a while.

“Well, I headed out to the garden one afternoon last year to pick tomatoes,” Barbara explains. “I was minding my own business, just walking down the row. I must’ve brushed past this bumblebee while he was on a cucumber blossom. Whatever I did, it didn’t suit him, because boy, did he come after me!”

Barbara says before she knew it, the angry insect had backed her up against her plank fence and was stinging her face and neck.

“Here I am a grown woman, having been around farm animals all my life, and I can’t get this one bumblebee off me!” she exclaims, recalling the story as she relaxes under a shade tree near

the Williamson County farmhouse she’s shared with husband Everett for 48 years. “Plus, it was muddy, and my boots got mired up so I couldn’t move very well. That bee followed me all the way out of the garden and back up to the house, until my son, Doug, smacked him down and stomped him. We counted 10 stings.”

“The long and the short of it is, I’m not growing any more cucumbers for a while!”

But Barbara is growing just about everything else in her immaculate garden. Surrounded by a sturdy plank fence, her perfect rows fill more than an acre and are loaded with sweet corn, cabbage, onions, peppers, beans, tomatoes, squash, and other veggies grown exclusively from Co-op seed. The outside row facing Byrd Road, a two-lane hard-

top that winds through the Bethesda community, is composed of cheerful marigolds and gladiolus — as if the aesthetics of the place weren’t already up to snuff. (If there is a weed within the carefully manicured borders of the garden, it’s too ashamed to show itself.)

With a grin weathered by years of life’s lessons, Barbara shrugs off any accolades she receives.

“I just do the best I can with it,” she says, patting the head of one of the two dozen stray cats she provides food for. “And honestly, [the garden] is not so much mine as it is the community’s. You could just consider me to be the caretaker.”

For the past several years, much of the bounty of Barbara’s garden has gone to supply a weekly “friendship meal” for homebound residents of the

Bethesda community. Every Monday morning, Barbara and several area volunteers gather at a local Methodist church and assemble nutritious hot meals they deliver throughout the afternoon, including the 13 on Barbara’s route. The volunteers also keep tabs on the residents throughout the week, providing transportation to the doctor when needed and helping to run errands.

“It’s a blessing to all of us, not just the folks receiving the help,” Barbara says. “It really gets my week going and motivates me. You know, we all have to help each other. We’re all trying to get to the same place.”

Learning “out of necessity”

Barbara has been helping others most of her life. One of 14 children (“I was in the middle”), Barbara learned how to cook and can food as a youngster in Maury County.

“It’s one of those things you learn



● Franklin

vegetable garden and a
 Kyle, Franklin dairy farmer
 caretaker to an entire community



LEFT: Barbara inspects one of her Chinese cabbage plants. This season, her garden vegetables include Co-op-brand green, roma, butter, white half-runner and pinto beans; sweet corn; squash; onions; sweet; cayenne; and jalopena peppers; and various tomatoes. Barbara estimates she cans more than 1,000 pint, quart, and gallon jars of vegetables every year. BELOW: These perfectly manicured rows of Texas sweet onions, Celebrity tomatoes, and Blue Lake green beans are typical of Barbara's garden.



out of necessity," she says. "We didn't really have anything when we were growing up. Daddy worked on the railroad and didn't make much of a wage, but he fed and clothed us. I learned to can on an old wood stove."

Barbara says the children were often pressed to pick wild blackberries for cobblers and jams.

"Daddy would walk miles and miles to find that biggest blackberry bush," she says. "We would have to come back with our buckets full. I remember us coming home with tubs full of berries."

After graduating from Hay Long High School in Mount Pleasant in 1957, Barbara married Everett, and the couple soon began dairying on their Williamson County farm.

"I've been milking ever since," she says. "I've always enjoyed fooling with those cows."

The couple, longtime members of Williamson Farmers Cooperative

currently milk around 55 Holsteins and produce beef cattle and hay on more than 250 acres spread over three farms. And in addition to the fresh vegetables used in the friendship meals, Barbara estimates she cans more than 1,000 quart, pint, and gallon jars of assorted veggies, salsa, pickles, and chow-chow every year — some for friends and family, and some for her own pantry.

"People think the world of her"

Kevin Crutcher, a salesman at Williamson Farmers Co-op's Franklin store and a close friend of the Hayeses, says Barbara and Everett are known in the community as farmers who excel at any task they attempt.

"Everything they do, they do well," he says. "Dairying, cutting hay, raising tobacco, you name it. And Barbara is just a valuable asset in the community. You know, she doesn't just do the friendship meal;

she gives out of her garden to anyone who needs a little help. People just think the world of her."

Her community's affection for Barbara was displayed in practical terms in early July when she was "run over" by two spooked Holsteins entering the milk barn.

"You know, in 48 years of milking, I've never been stomped like that," she says matter-of-factly. "Our old bull spooked the cows, and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I ended up with 15 stitches in one arm and very sore ribs."

Barbara says when word got out of her accident, friends, family, and neighbors descended on the farm to help harvest the sweet corn that was ripe on the stalk.

"It was wonderful," she says. "I couldn't do very much, and everyone just pitched in and did the job. We ended up freezing 31 gallon bags of corn. I was so thankful for the help."

Pointing to several kittens playing on her concrete patio, Barbara says she believes all of God's creations deserve a leg up whenever possible.

"You know, they didn't ask to be here," she says of the stray cats. "It's our job to take care of them, and as long as I'm able, I'm glad to do it."

Barbara's 'secret weapon'

Barbara Hayes still swears by the Earthway garden seeder (#18783) she purchased at her local Co-op some 10 years ago. The seeder allows Barbara to plant a variety of vegetable and flower seeds with one continuous operation of opening the soil, planting the seed, covering, and marking the next row. Barbara says the seed plates swap out easily and quickly, and the row marker spaces and indicates her next row accurately.

