

**Judith Irven, Master Gardener Class of 1995**  
**Project Leader, Therapeutic Gardens at Helen Porter Health and Rehabilitation Center**  
**Northwest Chapter**

**Photo:** Judith in late November spreading compost on her garden



I grew up in England, and while I always loved to visit beautiful gardens with my mother, I never did any actual gardening myself! Then, after coming to this country, I spent many years in suburban New Jersey, working as an information systems engineer.

But in 1994 my world changed: My husband and I moved to Vermont to run a bed-and breakfast inn - and I set out to create my very own 'garden of a lifetime'.

And, right after moving to

Vermont, the first thing I did was to enroll in the Master Gardener course in Rutland - at that time all classes were taught 'in-person' with the lecturers traveling each week from Burlington to various locations around the state.

Excited by everything that I learned in the Master Gardener course, I then enrolled at Vermont Technical College to study landscape design, after which I started my own landscape design business.

In 2005 Nancy Hulett invited me to teach Sustainable Home Landscaping as part of the Master Gardener course - something I have enjoyed doing ever since. Nancy had recently changed the mode of course delivery to use the Vermont Interactive Television system, with live lectures being broadcast to 14 locations across the state. This permitted students to watch the week's class as a group and then to pose their questions directly to the lecturer.

Today the format has evolved once again, with each pre-recorded lecture available to the students on-line, followed by a live Q and A session with the instructor via Zoom.

Also in 2005 I began as EMG project leader for the Therapeutic Gardens at Helen Porter Health and Rehabilitation Center in Middlebury - something I still thoroughly enjoy doing to this day.

I also love sharing my own garden with visitors, especially Master Gardener groups, both to describe its underlying design principles and also to show people the various plants I am able to grow up here in the mountains of Vermont, many of which are native to our region. I find that they thrive in our climate and are relatively pest-free; they also help me create a delightful wildlife-friendly habitat.

It also gives me much pleasure to share some of my gardening knowledge with others, both through teaching 'Sustainable Landscaping' for the Master Gardener course, and also by writing a blog and gardening columns for two local newspapers.