

Bill attributes much of the success of his company to his dedicated staff that creates and maintains amazing outdoor living spaces, and is just as passionate about the clients they work with as they are about the gardens they create. "We are a group of individuals with many years of landscape experience and talents in various areas of horticulture, but we all are of the same mindset regarding the quality of our work and customer service," he comments. "We focus on what we enjoy and where our talents lie—not firewood, lawn cutting and snowplowing. We are always trying to challenge the staff by creating original designs and details for construction, such as new stone projects and designs, new plants and moving bigger trees."

All Dear Garden projects follow specific guidelines to ensure customers are getting exactly what they had hoped for from the beginning. "Everyone in our group understands that customer service is paramount," says Bill. "Client input is essential—such as how they live and their budget."

The process begins with a free, on-site meeting to review the conditions of their property and the goals for the gardens. In some cases, the creation of a plan is the next step if the scope of the work will benefit from the design process, which assists both the customer and Dear Garden when determining details and coordinating elements such as driveways, pools, landscaping, plantings and lighting.

Upon approval of the design proposal, Dear Garden will visit the property to get detailed information, such as the topography and the location of existing structures and plants. Then, concepts showing potential shapes, dimensions and locations for landscaping and plantings, as well as any other items to be included, are presented. When the plan and preliminary pricing are approved, they create a final plan with proposals for installation.

"Our gardens are works of craftsmanship due to focus on details, materials and uniqueness," Bill notes. "Our designs are innovative, but must be fundamentally practical and sound or they won't succeed and last. I also believe the passion of our employees is unmatched. We hand draw our designs rather than using CAD. It is a slower process but we feel our layouts and plant placements are

more deliberate because it takes time to think about the plant, its location and to draw it, rather than just click a button on a mouse and drag a symbol around. Good design isn't about how fast you can draw; it's all about the quality of the final product and the details."

Dear Garden uses only local plants because they are more acclimated to this climate. Plants from the South and West Coast sometimes struggle in this climate and suffer damage in the winters. They focus on soil and plant locations and their relationships. Bill states that no matter how high quality a plant is at installation, if the soil isn't right, it will not flourish.

Bill adds that Dear Garden works to create a feel and environment in their gardens, not just to add color in a bed. "You need to use restraint in gardens. Just because you can put in something, doesn't mean it belongs."

With a focus on environmentally conscious practices, they recycle water for their nursery. In addition to catching and reusing water, they have drip irrigation installed to efficiently use the water caught. The system is calibrated to deliver the proper amounts of water required by the various plants in the nursery. Dear Garden also uses natural stone or clay bricks because they work well with the feel of the gardens they create. They avoid using concrete pavers or pre-cast products.

"We are planting and trying various types of plant material to see how they do in our region, and are also testing how they do in different soil types and in different amounts of light or water prior to using them in our gardens," Bill says. "We also have areas of the garden where we grow different plants together looking for different combinations of color and texture."

He adds, "We are also able to create different types of stone patios or walls to see how they work and for practice. We then gain ideas for designs and construction with the knowledge that we can do something we haven't seen before."

Bill notes that designs are often implemented over a number of years and that gardens change. "Our designs are unique due to the level of detail in our layouts, in addition to the materials we use," he explains. "We like to design spaces in new ways, rather than just follow a formula that has been done

before. We design to look great initially, and improve as they grow."

Dear Garden designs many period gardens, such as English gardens, wildflower meadows, and woodlands. When designing a period garden or restoration, their designs reference the past, but are original with the materials and final layout.

For Bill, one of the great aspects of gardening is the anticipation—a flower, fragrance, fall color, change of seasons. He also enjoys the problem solving aspect. "My work is never boring. There is always a new challenge like drainage, screening a neighbor, deer, wetness or dryness, or designing a beautiful area," he notes. "What I like most is making people happy and hearing positive feedback regarding our work."

Bill believes a growing trend in his business is creating outdoor environments rather than just plantings for color or along the foundation of a house. "Useful areas in the garden that can be used as an outdoor room or retreat—patios with fireplaces, outdoor kitchens, summerhouses and patios farther from the house—seem to be of interest to our customers," he adds. "Vegetable gardens, cutting gardens and plantings for fruit—orchards and berry bushes are becoming increasingly popular."

Bill is a member of many organizations, including the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the American Horticultural Society and the Association of Professional Landscape Designers. He has guest lectured at the Henry Foundation for Botanical Research, Temple University and various local gardening organizations, on the topics of Landscape Design, Plant Care, and landscape project management. He is also the Secretary for the Penn-Del chapter of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers.

Dear Garden is a sponsor of the Spring Garden Gala at Bowman's Hill Wildlife Preserve and was an exhibitor and corporate benefactor of the 2007 Bucks Beautiful Garden Fair Exhibit. They also have a garden in the New Hope Historical Society 15th Annual Garden Tour. Dear Garden Associates can be reached by calling 215-766-8110 or by visiting ([www.deargarden.com](http://www.deargarden.com)). ❖

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