

SOWING SEEDS BETWEEN SUTURES

The very green thumb of Bill Holloway, M.D. • by Eric Minton

The soggy ground grips the wheelchair as Bill Holloway moves through the garden at his Greenwood, South Carolina, home. He rolls among rows of long, waist-high flower boxes, one of which holds some 50 rose varieties. Waves of purple petunias and Bath's pink spill over the sides, and the red-cone blossoms of astilbes sway in the breeze like flames flickering at neighboring ferns.

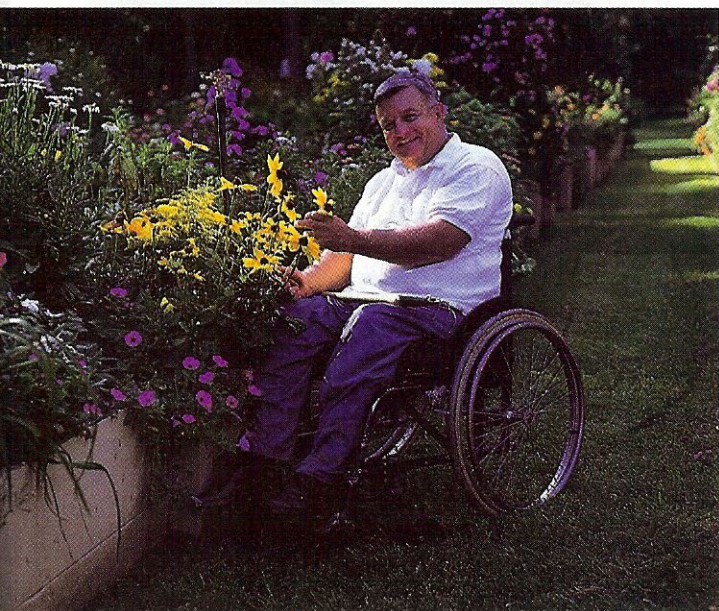
Normally Dr. Holloway would use his gardening chair, a Quickie with heavy-tread wheels, but it's in the shop for repairs. When the conventional wheelchair bogs down, 26-year-old Jon, here for a quick visit, gives his dad a push. "If I'm alone and get stuck, I'm out of luck," the elder Holloway says matter-of-factly.

A butterfly with black, orange, and blue marbling on its wings visits the long, languid petals of a purple-and-pink star gazer lily, then flits away. The garden on Bill and Suzy Holloway's two-and-a-half-acre lot attracts butterflies by the dozens, as well as countless bees, a few hummingbirds, and the occasional patient from Bill's vascular surgery practice. All are welcome, save chipmunks.

"Chipmunks drive me crazy," Dr. Holloway says. "They pick up sunflower seeds and plant them everywhere." Indeed, sharing a pot with an orange tree on his deck is a sunflower that had evaded Holloway's notice until it was about six inches high. "It looked like it deserved to live," he recalls. "Plus, I wanted to see it bloom."

This desire to watch things bloom doesn't fully explain the brilliant spectrum sown by this 61-year-old physician. Although he comes from horticultural stock, the once avid water-skier and quail hunter didn't take up gardening in this big a way until a debilitating 1983 car accident (*continued on page 137*)

Dr. Holloway keeps close tabs on his blooms.



During Greenwood's annual Festival of Flowers, some 500 people from across the United States tread through the Holloways' yard.

(from page 134) left him with a sudden recreational void. Today the garden not only gives him the outdoor activity he craves and the relaxation he needs after a day in the operating room, but it has also spread his fame like pollen.

Dr. Holloway gets regular invitations to address area garden clubs and gives talks for the South Carolina Botanical Garden's winter lecture series, and he and his garden rank as perennials on the private garden tour circuit. During Greenwood's annual Festival of Flowers, an event that momentarily doubles the upstate South Carolina town's population (20,000), some 500 people from across the United States tread admiringly through the Holloways' yard.

The rest of the year, Holloway plays impromptu garden host, often to patients who have taken him up on his open invitation and dropped by unannounced to stroll among the flower boxes, inspect the beds of butterfly gardens, and behold the orchid-filled greenhouse. "Frequently I'll come home and find people walking around the garden," he says offhandedly, noting that no one has ever taken so much as a flower petal without asking.

As the chipmunks' sole surviving sunflower can attest, Holloway's approach to gardening is much more nonchalant than his approach to



The garden's design not only meets Dr. Holloway's needs but also accommodates informal tours.

vascular surgery. "The degree of responsibility for a vascular surgeon is so great," he reflects. "You have to be so right, with no margin for error, because you're working with worn-out merchandise, trying to keep it working.

"Gardening is such a relaxing thing to do," he explains, "because I don't have any responsibility. I just plant it, and if it works, it works. If it doesn't, I do it over again." But Holloway wasn't always so unperturbed. One summer his sister, Barbara Smith, a landscape designer, gave him some salvia to plant. As the summer passed and the salvia hadn't bloomed, "he got mad and pulled it

out," Smith recalls. He didn't know it was an autumn blossom.

Even today, the science of horticulture is not this gardener's forte. "Every time he does a slide talk, I have to go down a couple of weeks ahead of time and go through the slides and give him the names of everything," Smith says. "He'll call it 'the red flower, the yellow flower.'"

Although Dr. Holloway may not have the terminology nailed, he has become an excellent judge of what works and what doesn't. After years of trial and error and experimenting with new species, he now plants a garden that

flourishes year-round with a pleasing mix of colors, heights, and scents.

"He's got the gift," acknowledges his orchid-envying sister.

Holloway may have inherited his gardening bug from the grandmother who penned poetry about her flowers. Or perhaps from the great-grandmother who grew a variety of buddleia so particular to her garden that it is now named for her. In any case, he comes by both his

back and would never walk again.

Consequently, he says, he didn't experience the denial-stage depression that usually engulfs patients with such injuries. He did, however, despair when the physicians at Roger Peace Rehabilitation Center in Greenville advised him to look for a new career. But then an orderly at the center gave him hope: "He said, 'You know, you don't operate with your feet,'" Holloway recalls. "That struck me."

house to the greenhouse. This stage showcases his herb garden, dwarf fruit trees, and countless flowers. The greenhouse, where he keeps a couple hundred orchids (including cattleya, a favorite for corsages because of its fist-sized deep purple blooms), features high counters with roll-under space and wheeled three-tier platforms that make tending potted plants easier.

Although Holloway's sister says he has "been bitten by the perennial

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avocation and his vocation naturally. His grandfather was a country doctor who owned a 600-acre cotton farm in nearby Chappells, and his father is a retired family practitioner and cattle farmer.

Two of his brothers also went into medicine. In Bill's case, a 1963 degree from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston and subsequent fellowships ultimately led him right back where he started. Precisely: The Greenwood office of his surgical practice sits where the hospital he was born in once stood.

As his practice grew, Holloway farmed soybeans on the side at the family farm in Chappells. At home, he tended a small vegetable garden and a few rosebushes.

Driving home one August night in 1983, Holloway was hit head-on by a car passing another on a hill. The impact spun his car around, and he was rear-ended by the next car. Conscious until he reached the ER, Holloway knew that he had suffered a broken

Dr. Holloway returned to his medical practice four months after the accident, initially working part-time in the lab and running the office. Within six months, he was back in the operating room, using a table that had been modified to provide roll-under space. Today he carries an equal share of the surgery load. The only procedures he must hand off to a partner are those requiring access to the abdominal cavity, which he can't adequately reach.

When his wife encouraged him to resume gardening to sate his love of the outdoors, Dr. Holloway didn't believe he was physically capable. His sister, who had taken a course in hortitherapy, admonished his new can't-do attitude and showed him how to garden with boxes. "It didn't take much pushing; it was just 'Yes, you can do this,'" she says.

Specially designed waist-high flower boxes—3 feet wide and 24 feet long—inspired other adaptations. A two-level wooden deck with a ramp leads from the back door of his

bug," his taste in flowers spans the horticultural spectrum. "Bill and I both are plant pack rats. We call each other a couple times a week saying, 'Have you seen this kind of plant, have you read about it?' We're always trying to find something different and new."

In summer Holloway spends late afternoons weeding, pruning, and battling beetles. In winter he starts seeds in the greenhouse while lettuce gives the outside boxes continuous, albeit muted, color. Springtime finds him clearing out old plants and transplanting seedlings.

Looking across Holloway's carefully tended landscape, the casual observer sees more than a pleasure in being outdoors—namely, a devotion to gardening.

Yet Holloway insists it is pure play. Medicine remains his driving force. He gives one full day a week to the garden. The other days of the week, the garden gives to him. ■

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