



PHOTOS BY JOHN BYRUM/JOHN.BYRUM@SHJ.COM  
Charlie and Joyce Crescenzi have transformed their yard from scrub pines to a beautiful garden over a five-year period since moving into their home on the east side of Spartanburg.

# Passionate transplants

## Couple transform pine-filled lot into a luscious garden



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Garden Cameos

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To see a gallery of photographs from the Crescenzi's garden, visit [GoUpstate.com](http://GoUpstate.com).

When Charlie and Joyce Crescenzi were living and working in York, Pa., six years ago, they never imagined that life's trail would carry them to Spartanburg. But like all transplants living here now, they love it.

One winter, Charlie and Joyce agreed that they were tired of the gray skies and snow. They were retired, Charlie from a history-teacher position and Joyce from a job as a pension administrator.

They were planning to look in Greensboro, N.C., where their son lives, so they put their house up for sale. In two weeks, the house had sold and the new owners wanted to move in in four weeks. Panic set in.

A friend living in Spartanburg sent them some material about our city, and Charlie and Joyce were intrigued. They made a trip to Spartanburg, met a real estate agent, and before they knew it, they had bought a house on Spartanburg's east side.

"Spartanburg is just like York, Pa., except the sun shines every day and the people talk funny!" Charlie said. Thirty days later, they

were living here. Their three children, all grown, were amazed. They have a daughter who is an organic farmer and an artist in Ware Shoals. One of their sons works for American Express in Greensboro, and the other son is a head chef in New Jersey.

All three kids are plant nuts like their mother. Joyce gets her love of plants from her mother. She spent her youth reading books, had African violets and learned as much as she could.

"Winter was the perfect time to read these books on plants," she said. "My arbor came about by me checking out books from the library on hardscaping and reading about how to construct one. I had a wealth of information at my fingertips! There was a lot of beauty in the books."

It warms Joyce's heart to see her son Robert becoming interested in plants, too.

When Joyce and Charlie moved into their 50-year-old house in March 2006, the lot was filled with pine trees. She wanted a wooded lot but got one too many pines. So Charlie cleared the lot. There

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**KNOCKOUT ROSE**



**PURPLE AJUGA,  
CHARTRUSE CREEPING JENNY**



**PHLOX**





# GARDEN

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were overgrown azaleas that needed pruning.

They moved several of the azaleas and started the center bed, which is the focal point of their garden today. Eventually Joyce and her next-door neighbor took out the pines and wound up with azaleas in full sun. Charlie waters every day.

Joyce created her garden from cuttings and transplants from gardener friends. She has also bought many plants from the nurseries and big-box store sales and reject tables.

The center island bed has an abundance of cone flowers, where they leave the spent blossoms on so they will go to seed and attract the goldfinches. There is also black eyed susan, lantana, phlox, spider wort, azaleas and a crepe myrtle that was grown from a shoot. There is also a flowering plum and a red bud that came up as a volunteer.

Another bed along the side, nicknamed "the peninsula," is full of transplanted plants and cuttings. It is also home to the arbor she was inspired to build. The arbor hosts a wonderful mandavilla that is overwintered in the garage.

There are verbenas, azaleas, nandinas, and overwintered petunias planted in abundance. In addition there are three Japanese hollies, day lilies and clematis vines with tomato plants, watermelon and cantaloupe among the flowers. There is also a mass of gaillardia, which Joyce says is one of her best plants. To round out the peninsula bed is a kousa dogwood tree.

The bed along the back of the house is full of azaleas, healthy hydrangeas and a very good-looking combination of chartreuse creeping jenny mingled with purple ajuga. Mixed to round out the bed are hostas, mountain laurel and acubas.

The front garden is one of Joyce's favorite places. She loves to eat her breakfast and sometimes lunch on the front porch as she watches the world go by.

The front porch is complete with her favorite houseplants that overwinter

inside the sun room and garage. There are railing boxes (which are window boxes that fit securely on the porch railing) filled with geraniums, lobelia, million bells, wax leaf begonias and garlic chive.

The front garden bed is planted with knockout roses that Joyce got on a garden tour as a free gift.

"There were six plants in one pot!" she said. "So I divided them and planted them out in the garden along with several under-a-dollar rose plants."

In the front garden under a large oak tree on the corner is a bench. Every year Joyce sets out her spider plant on that bench, as a sign that spring is here. This year she added a pair of old sneakers planted up with some dragon wing begonias.

Along the back of their property, playfully referred to as Campbell Alley, the couple got permission from their neighbors to plant up a "dead space." It is filled with crepe myrtles, day lilies, oregano, forsythia, iris, ice plant, azaleas, gladiolas and nandinas grown from seed.

The space is turning into a wonderful addition to the garden and is enjoyed by both families. Along the side of the garden is Joyce's red garden that is filled with a dragon wing begonia, a door prize from the Garden Club, and some red impatiens mixed in with some abelia.

After almost six years Joyce and Charlie have finally blended their new life with the community organization, the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club. Charlie is chairman of the container garden while Joyce is membership chairman. Both are board members and love being part of the club.

One of the gardens that Joyce and Charlie take care of is the Sherrill Garden across from Hillcrest shopping center. Joyce is amazed at how many people stop and say thank you when they are working there. It seems like small work, but it makes a big impression.

Joyce says that a neighbor drove by one day and stopped and said, "You must be green all over!"

It is compliments like that that let Joyce know that her garden is an expression of herself. Gardening is a wonderful form of art in three dimensions.