Nancy Goldman has always been serious about her gardening. “I got involved with the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon early on,” she says. “I’ve been on the board, was president for four years… I’m knee deep in gardening, maybe waist high now.” But not too serious. This is Portland, Oregon, after all, where the eccentric and the whacky are more or less mainstream, and where ‘Keep Portland Weird’ is almost the city motto.

Perhaps Nancy’s, and indeed Portland’s, secret is to combine creativity with good organisation and clear forward planning. “I went to Portland Nursery with a wagon, and I bought perennials A through M,” remembers Nancy. “And then later went back and bought them from N through Z.” That’s serious plant buying, however, plants are only part of the story. For much of the 30 or so years Nancy has worked on her modest-sized suburban garden, it was most notable for crazy sculptural displays of found objects, many discovered in skips, from what Nancy calls “dumpster diving.”

The planting now takes centre stage, although there are still plenty of reminders of her older style. Look and you will find a washbasin, two seats, a supermarket trolley, and a typewriter, all planted up.

The planting here is incredibly skilful. Anyone walking past Nancy’s house gets a taster, as the front garden is densely planted,
What is immediately obvious in the front garden, and which is carried on in the back, is the density of Nancy’s planting. This is absolutely not because plants are crammed in, as a closer look reveals how well everything is layered. “I try to get the right place for everything, and I don’t want things looking forced,” explains Nancy. “The garden is systematic, even though it looks blowsy, or outrageous or crazy or whatever.” It is not just the physical arrangement of the plants, but the level of care too: “I’m always out there doing something maintenance wise,” she says. “The way you dress and the way your house looks, is the way your garden looks too,” she declares.

There has been plenty of hard work, Nancy started with a lifetime of learning about plants and putting them together, and rewards seem to be good growth, although with the hot, dry summers typical of Portland there still needs to be some summer irrigation. Above all, however, this is a garden that represents half a lifetime of learning about plants and putting them together, and that is exactly what makes it such a success.

USEFUL INFORMATION
Nancy’s garden is not generally open to the public, but she does open on selected days for members of the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon. See hardyplantsociety.org for details.

8 favourite plants from Nancy’s garden

1. *Colocasia esculenta ‘Mojito’*
   - A type of a common tropical vegetable (taro), but with variegated leaves – up to 60cm long – that have a different pattern on each leaf. It requires warm summer nights to succeed, and in the UK should really be grown indoors. Carefully needs to be brought inside over winter 90cm. USDA 7b-10b†.

2. *Clematis ‘Princess Diana’*
   - An herbaceous species, so starts up again every year from ground level. Long summer flowering. 2.5-4m. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-11.

3. *Salix Varieda*
   - A very long flowering, herbaceous salix that originates from a nursery in Buenos Aires in Argentina. Sun and fertile soil needed. 1.2m. RHS H4, USDA 6a-11.

4. *Ligustrum sinense ‘Sunshine’*
   - An evergreen privet with golden-variegated leaves. Can be kept clipped if needed. Best in full sun and tolerates a wide range of conditions. 2m. RHS H6, USDA 7a-9b.

5. *Miscanthus sinensis ‘Gold Bar’*
   - Horizontal gold bands on fine leaves make an impact from spring onwards. Will produce flower/seedheads at the end of warm summers. Non-seeding. 1.5m. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.

6. *Lysimachia congestiflora ‘Persian Chocolate’*
   - A type of a common tropical vegetable (taro), but with variegated leaves – up to 60cm long – that have a different pattern on each leaf. It requires warm summer nights to succeed, and in the UK should really be grown indoors. Carefully needs to be brought inside over winter 90cm. USDA 7b-10b†.

7. *Clematis ‘Étoile Violette’*
   - A vigorous species but with light growth, making it suitable for scrambling over shrubs; flowers late summer, hard annual pruning needed. 3m. RHS H7, USDA 6a-9b.

8. *Lilium ‘Lionheart’*
   - A type of a common tropical vegetable (taro), but with variegated leaves – up to 60cm long – that have a different pattern on each leaf. It requires warm summer nights to succeed, and in the UK should really be grown indoors. Carefully needs to be brought inside over winter 90cm. USDA 7b-10b†.