



Tropical Paradise in Indiana

These gardeners often sit near the night-blooming jasmine, elephant ears and bananas. They pull up a chair and watch as the coral fuchsia blooms draw hummingbirds.

And yes, this is in Indianapolis!



Above: Nearing the end of the patio path, one can see containers of tropicals on both the left and the right. Opposite page: A large gathering of containers under the red maple has an upright elephant ear (*Alocasia* spp.) reigning supreme with angel wing begonias, dracaenas and cordylines below.

For six months of the year, one can pass the home of Dr. Freeman and Libby (Elizabeth) Martin and just say, “That’s a nice house.” For the other six months of the year, one drives by and says, “Oh...my...Goodness!” The transformation is dramatic, to say the least. What occurs to make this dramatic change? The landscape goes from a middle of America look to a middle of the tropics look. From the front of the driveway to the back of the property—tropicalismo reigns.

What began as an interest in vegetables and herbs has grown into a full-fledged passion for gardening. At first it was Libby who planted a few things for the family table. Then her husband

got the bug and started to plant the vegetables and herbs. And things were “normal” for a while.

A special family birthday nearly 20 years ago prompted the Martins to add a patio around the red maple in their backyard. Along the patio a large planting bed was created under some Colorado spruce trees. Suddenly there was space for perennials and containers.

The tropicals and annuals in the perennial beds were just for fill and extra color at first. But Freeman Martin soon developed a much greater passion for the showy (Libby Martin might say gaudy) tender plants than he felt for the perennials. The garden

Purple Wave
pot

The old crabapple along the back property line may lose its leaves but its great structure adds so much to this planting of tropicals (coleus, zebra bananas and fuchsia) and hostas.



Left: An 8-foot-tall yellow brugmansia greets visitors at the end of the drive. Come evening, its fragrance will fill the air. *Petunia* 'Purple Wave', *Ipomoea batatas* 'Marguerite' (sweet potato vine) and *Coleus* 'Pink Chaos' cover the ground below. **Right:** Bright coral fuchsia 'Gartenmeister Bonstedt' and 'Jungle Gold' impatiens glow in the patio bed.

soon became a tropical paradise. Yes, there are still hostas, but now they grow with tree ferns and bananas.

The patio is truly a paradise. The scent of night-blooming jasmine fills the air in the evening. Coral fuchsia blooms entice hummingbirds to visit. Bold glossy foliage in shades of chartreuse, purple, pink, yellow and orange grows from the many containers populating the patio. The containers give the patio its incredible appeal. The Martins' secret to making containers even more dramatic is to vary the height by placing some of the pots on top of empty upside-down pots thus making a tall plant a giant plant.

The garden begins its transformation in mid to late May as the tropicals come out of storage. Overwintered plants are supplemented with new cultivars and species each summer. It's a great way to keep the garden from getting tired and the Martins from getting bored.

The worst day of the entire gardening season? The one after the first fall frost. 🍂

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