

# Homestead on High Prairie

*Couple expands their interest in horticulture to a new—yet lower—height*

By Jeanie Senior

“Look for a lot of trees,” Suzanne Krieg says, giving directions to the property on High Prairie where she lives with her husband, Billy.

Their homestead’s big-sky aspect and views of Mount Adams, Mount Hood, Mount St. Helens and a bit of Mount Rainier give the place a top-of-the world feel.



Suzanne Krieg displays a handful of Peruvian blue potatoes, one of several varieties she and her husband grow without pesticides.

Of course, that is relative. The property’s elevation—2,200 feet—is considerably less than the ranch west of Cripple Creek, Colorado, where the Kriegs lived for a while and raised horses at more than 9,000-foot elevation.

“One year that we lived there, we had a growing season of 35 days—not even time enough to grow peas,” Suzanne says. “We had to buy a lot of hay that year.”

They bought the High Prairie land in 1998. It was undeveloped, but the real estate agent assured them Klickitat PUD would extend power to the area in about a year.

“We figured, we probably can’t get anything built there for a while anyhow,” she says.

Most days, Billy drove to High Prairie from their home in Wishram, working on the property while Suzanne was at her job at Mid-Columbia Medical Center in The Dalles, where she has been a switchboard operator for 21 years.

The couple moved to High Prairie in 2004. Their house, built with a great deal of recycled and reused materials, is built around a tree- and plant-filled central courtyard, with a shade house and greenhouse on the fourth side of the square.

A 65-tree orchard is planted with walnut, almond and hazelnut trees as well as plums, prunes and apples. There is a row of raspberries next to the driveway, grapevines twine around a walkway inside the courtyard, and potatoes and tomatoes grow in a sizeable garden.

“We had to fence around the entire homestead because of the deer,” Suzanne says. “They stand at the fence in winter and they drool.”

Suzanne’s proclivity for growing nursery plants began in Wishram, where she and Billy lived in a cottage on a small lot.

“There was pretty much nothing in the yard—no landscaping to speak of—so we started growing things, having fun with it and selling some,” she says.

Suzanne became a Master Gardener while living in Colorado “back in the dark days of the last century,” she says. “If you can grow a garden in Colorado, you know your stuff!”

The couple left Colorado because “rich people were pricing us out of the market,” says Suzanne, who was born in Boston and raised on the East Coast.

“Land was becoming too high in Colorado—undeveloped land, like where we would be willing to start out,” she says. “It was just way too much money. Put a septic system, power and a well on top of that—if you could find water, which is a real challenge.”



**Billy and Suzanne Krieg on their High Prairie property, which includes a 65-tree orchard and a greenhouse where Suzanne grows nursery plants for sale.**

Billy, a Colorado native, grew up on a cattle ranch in Eastern Colorado. His was a rodeo family, he says, with aunts who are in the Cheyenne Frontier Days Hall of Fame. His father was a bull dogger. Billy remembers traveling as a youth to watch relatives compete in rodeos in Fort Worth, Texas, at Madison Square Garden in New York City and Soldier Field in Chicago. Billy left the ranch to serve in World War II, used the GI Bill afterward to go to college, and returned to Colorado.

When the couple decided to find land somewhere outside Colorado, “We thought about where we have been that we liked, that we’d like to go back to,” Suzanne says. “We kind of liked Oregon. We subscribed to the Hood River paper for a while and read about property prices and thought, ‘Maybe we’ll try that.’”

After the Kriegs moved to Klickitat County in 1992, Suzanne started working with the Master Gardeners in Goldendale and sold plants at the Earth Day observance in Goldendale. One year, she sold \$1,600 worth.

Now, as The Briar Rose, Suzanne has expanded the number of nursery plants she sells, growing most of them from seed. Many are native plants, but “I try to have a lot of things that deer don’t like,” she says. “I look at the list the Soil Conservation district puts out and see if I can grow some of those things.”

The Kriegs’ garden is the result of much effort, as they have

worked to improve the clay soil.

“Potatoes grow well here, for some reason, also tomatoes,” Suzanne says. “We don’t do very well with sweet corn, so we finally said to heck with it. We have a sheltered place for the garden, and we put trees in for a windbreak and rototilled in our barn cleanings. Our little patch of garden has improved every year.”

Starting with potato seeds Suzanne found in the organic department of a grocery store, and augmented by potato starts and varieties offered by specialty catalogs, she steadily expanded her potato offerings. This year she had 15 varieties, ranging in color from deep blue and purple to red and rose, to white—gourmet varieties not readily available in the area. The potatoes sell for 80 cents a pound if people drive to High Prairie to pick them up; otherwise they are \$1 a pound.

The Kriegs grow their potatoes without pesticides or herbicides.

“A lot of people like the idea of potatoes grown without any chemicals,” Suzanne says.

The assortment includes potatoes from several countries, including Russia, France and Holland, as well as the dark blue Peruvians, which explorers took back to Europe. The darker-colored potatoes are high in antioxidants, Suzanne says, joking that “in our house, we serve hash blues.” ■