



photo by Dan Muro

by Janet Leonardi

**By Pond Farm's
summer gardens**

A farm in bloom

Bountiful gardens, lush landscapes and a barnyard of exotic animals are just some of the charms of this idyllic haven



Above, A view of By Pond Farm's completely renovated charming 1800s house. Right, raised bed gardens designed by owners Dan Ruhland and Laurence Craig. Today, more than 100 different varieties of fruits and vegetables are grown on the farm.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FATE THAT brought Dan Ruhland and his partner, Laurence Craig, to By Pond Farm in bucolic Tewksbury Township, but whatever it was, the two agree it was meant to be.

In 2007 Ruhland, an accomplished interior designer who grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm, and Craig, a successful caterer who hails from the Middlesex County town of Old Bridge, were busy urbanites in search of a week-end getaway property in Bucks County.

"When we couldn't find anything there that actually suited us. Our realtor remembered this place for sale in

Hunterdon County and decided to take a chance and show it to us," Craig recalls.

That place was By Pond Farm, a sprawling 10-acre property complete with a vintage 1800s house overlooking a serene, glass-like pond. "We immediately saw the house had good bones but it was actually the property, beautiful pond, antique red barn and collection of small outbuildings that initially attracted us," Ruhland says.

The two were well aware making the farm their own was a project that would require a great deal of work, but agreed the end result would definitely be worth all their time and effort.



photo by Dan Muro



photo by Dan Muro



photo by Dan Muro

Above, the farm's namesake, a serene pond on the scenic 10-acre property. Pictured left, a wooden deck with a dining table and chairs also features an antique sink used to rinse freshly picked produce.

They put their original plans for a weekend place aside, purchased the farm and permanently moved out of the city and into one of the property's pool houses. From there they designed and supervised the extensive renovations to both the house and land.

Even though Ruhland had grown up on a farm he admits everything at By Pond was a learning experience for him as well as Craig, "I really can't say I was going back to my rural roots because I only knew how to milk cows."

They gutted the entire house and had just about every surface redone to their

specs. "We even decided to add a wide porch to overlook the barn and pond," Ruhland explains.

Getting the property acreage into shape proved to be an equally challenging task because much of the land was overgrown. "We had acres cleared and 40 truckloads of brush and debris carted away. Organizing that project alone took three months," Ruhland says.

The pair then promptly planted a small vegetable garden close to the pool house. "There were no gardens at all when we moved here and gardens were definitely part of our master plan,"



This page, Llamas are just some of the farm's animal residents. Pictured opposite, Ruhland and Craig spin natural wool from their sheep into yarn on this antique spinning wheel.

Ruhland says. "Now we not only have the original garden but have added a larger one as well and grow more than 100 different varieties of fruits and vegetables."

These include everything from tomatoes, onions, beans, garlic, cucumbers, lettuce and herbs to watermelons, peaches, figs, plums, raspberries, strawberries and grapes. "We use it for ourselves, friends and when we give dinner parties," Ruhland says.

Ruhland designed the layout and structure of the main garden, which is

approached via a curving stone path that leads behind the barns and chicken coops. It's organic and contains raised beds overflowing with fresh produce in season. There's a wooden deck and soaring pergola and it has a dining table and chairs where one can sit to enjoy the stunning landscape views. There's even an antique sink for washing freshly harvested fruits and vegetables.

Ruhland and Craig take care of all the gardening themselves with the exception of someone coming once a week to help with cleanup. They also enjoy starting



Photo by Janet Leonard

new plants from seeds. "This year we are putting down landscape fabric to help keep weeds down," Ruhland says.

As fervent as the pair is about gardening, they're equally committed to the farm's numerous animal residents. "When we first arrived, Larry and I would take night walks around the pond carrying a flashlight. We quickly realized the water was alive with a variety of marine life that still includes snapping turtles, perch, trout and some really huge catfish," Ruhland says.

It seems these resident fish were just the beginning. "We knew we wanted animals to inhabit the barn," Ruhland says. "So our first year here

we bought six sheep and they were soon joined by two Dexter steers, which we acquired from a neighbor."

But By Pond's animal acquisitions didn't stop there. Their sheep flock swelled to the current 16 which today includes Hampshire, Cheviot, Jacob and Icelandic breeds.

Another prized addition to By Pond's animal kingdom is Donatella, a regal llama. "We spotted her at the Hunterdon County Fair and were very disappointed when we were told she was already sold. Larry, however, wouldn't give up and asked the seller to call us if the sale didn't go through. Sure enough it didn't; we got a call a few weeks later and she was ours," Ruhland says.

Donatella now has a female llama friend, Conchita, and last spring both became the proud mothers of baby llamas, increasing the By Pond herd to four.

Add to them an eclectic assortment of angora and Nigerian dwarf goats, Royal Palm turkeys, Polish chickens, Indian Runner ducks, Pekin ducks; domestic geese, mini-donkeys and fluffy angora rabbits and it's easy to see how the farm's creature contingent has swelled to more than 80.

Needless to say any contingent this large requires faithful guardians but the diligent homeowners thought this through as well. "Larry did a lot of research and found our Akbash dogs, Lola and Zubin, which we purchased from a breeder in Kansas. The Akbash is a perfect choice because it's a Turkish breed of livestock protection dogs.

Besides providing the owners with enormous pleasure, their animals also provide upwards of 150 chicken and duck eggs each week and the sheep, llamas and rabbits provide countless pounds of soft wool.

"One of the large sheep could yield as many as 15 to 20 pounds of fleece so we have a shearer come here and then send the raw fleece out to be cleaned," Ruhland says. The two then spin the clean natural wool into yarn on an antique spinning wheel that sits in the farm's charming hobby room.

"We took a class in Frenchtown to learn how to spin because we also like to knit and crochet but it's getting harder and harder to find the spare time," Craig says.

These days with the über busy owners' spare time at such a premium, it seems By Pond's future might not include any more new projects. But Ruhland clearly seems to have left that barn door open saying, "At some point we'd like to redo the pool house; the pool and maybe even add a greenhouse."

NJC

Janet Leonardi is an accomplished freelance writer and a frequent contributor to New Jersey Countryside.



The farm's chickens and ducks provide more than 150 eggs each week.

Photo by Janet Leonardi