

City Hall

Noted City Hall Gardens In Full Bloom

By BILL NEUBAUER
Sentinel Staff Writer

The gardens at Santa Cruz City Hall have attained a midsummer perfection few persons would care to miss.

The flowers have come into a vigorous, brilliantly full bloom. Trees, shrubs and grass are a luminant green. Bees drone their blacks and golds everywhere, birds sing and flaunt their colors, the fountains splash and gleam in ever-changing patterns of light and shadow.

There's a cat in the scene, too.

"He's to keep the birds nimble," a girl explained to a friend while touring the gardens last week. "Poor old cat. I bet the birds laugh."

However, few persons take time to notice the cat sunning his old bones on the roof of police headquarters. Most visitors are too busy discovering botanical delights which have been tucked almost everywhere for their pleasure by a young fellow who "always wanted to be a gardener" and who made it in a way that keeps camera shutters clicking.

He is Richard L. Criswell. As a kid some 15 years ago, he enrolled in a parks and recreation department summer program called "workreation."

The work part of the program included tidying up Harvey West Park and the beaches.

Through the program, Criswell developed a big yen to become a city gardener.

Almost five years ago Criswell achieved his ambition and became a gardener under Ernie Schaen, park department general foreman.

"I started under him in the workreation program," Criswell said. "He's a fabulous guy to work for."

Criswell said when he first became senior gardener at city hall he was more than a little nervous.

"Nobody said much," he recalled Friday. "They all sort of stood back to let me show what I could do."

What Criswell has done is help to make the city hall complex well-known throughout this nation and Canada.

Working primarily alone, Criswell designs three seasonal gardens a year for city hall, then plants and maintains them while growing at home a variety of plants for the next seasonal garden.

look at the gardens, so I try to keep from using the same plants and designs."

This autumn, the gardens will include around 1,800 chrysanthemum plants. There will be many colors and varieties. Colors will be utilized carefully for maximum effect, just as lemon yellow and orange marigolds are being shown off now in containers bordered with luxuriant splashes of deep blue lobelia.

Criswell said he grows many plants at home to keep costs down.

"We don't spend much on the gardens," he said. "I get help from some kids and from the parks department when I need it, but mostly I work alone. If I grow things at home, there's money for what I do want. I can buy pretty much what I want because the total costs are low."

Persons who want a maximum garden for minimum cost are advised by Criswell to buy annuals.

"I do this a lot because they don't cost much and they give you a real show. An expensive plant blooms just a little while, but then you have it the rest of the year. I can remove the annuals as they lose their beauty and replace with something else."

But the gardens have grand trees and shrubs as background or accent pieces. The shaped trees in the front courtyard are bays. Along the Church Street side, almost the full length of the property, they're myrtle.

In bloom just now are cannas, zinnias, lantana, petunias, tuberous and fibrous begonias (look under the stairs), to name just a few blossoms.

Look, too, for petunia "columns" in the central courtyard. These are chicken wire columns stuffed with earth and moss to provide a footing for the plants.

"I like to try different things," Criswell said.

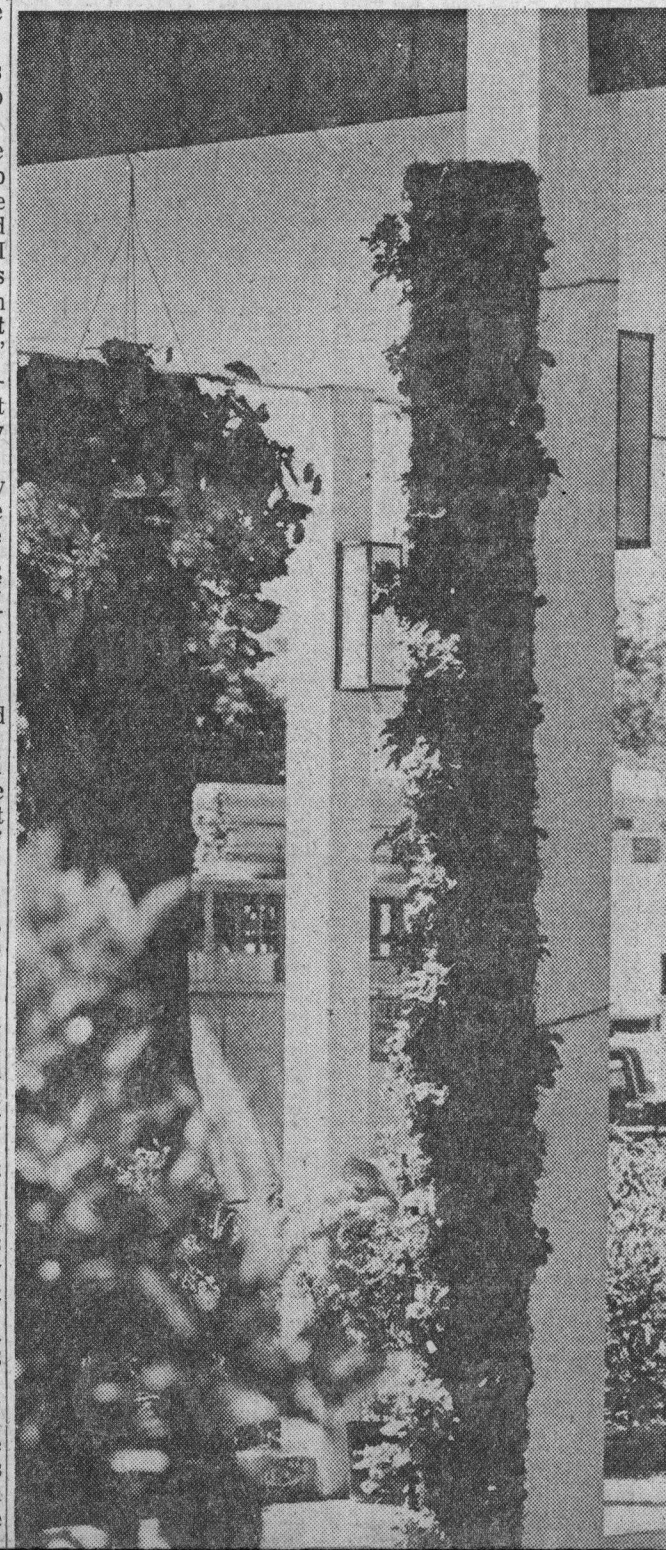
Criswell said he is asked always questions by gardeners and would-be gardeners. Many wonder how the lawns are kept so fresh and green.

"We have a regular fertilizing schedule and we trim by hand," Criswell said. "Most important, however, is correct watering. We water every night for five minutes only. Grass has superficial roots. If you water a half hour twice weekly you're not helping the grass much."

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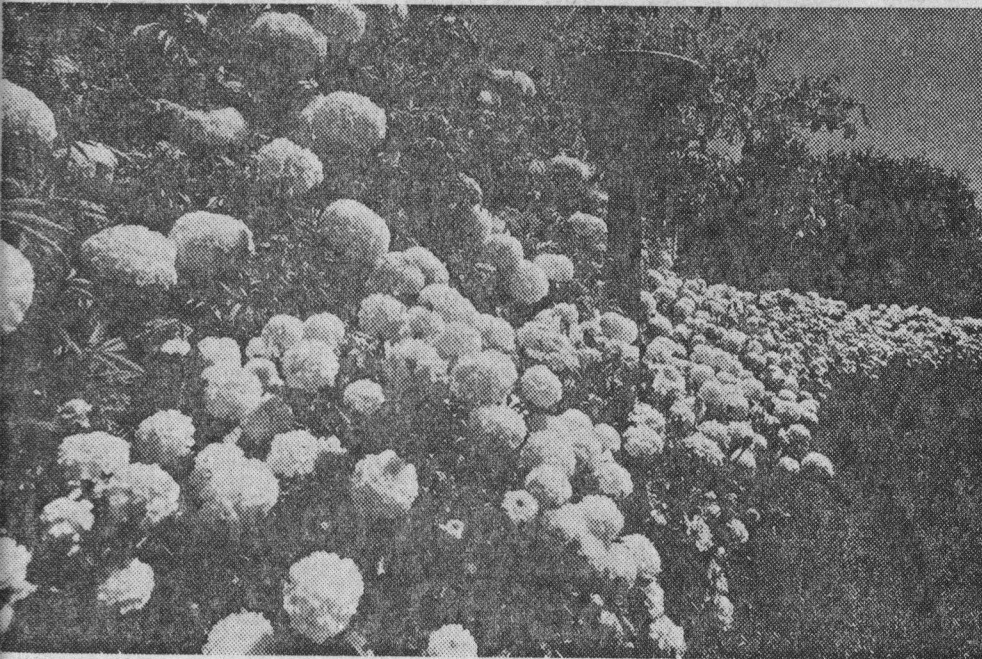


"I try to have something different each season, each year," Criswell said. "A lot of people from all over the U.S. and Canada keep coming back to

But the real key to developing gardens, Criswell said, is imagination and careful work. "They're both important," he stressed.

ENGINEER LICENSED

Stanley Dale Thomas, 325 River St., has been licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard as a third engineer to serve aboard American-flag ships after completing the two-year course at the Calhoun Engineering School in Baltimore, Md. The school is sponsored by the National Marine Engineers' Beneficial The Rev. Alexander Anderson



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