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Planted with love, gardens help cancer patients heal

Hope in Bloom's gift brightens times of treatment and beyond

By Wendy Killeen
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During the eight years Kathy Makiver has lived in her Garrison Colonial in Georgetown, she's had good intentions of planting a garden in the large backyard.

But with lack of a green thumb and little free time because of a job, husband, and three kids, a garden never materialized — until a recent Saturday.

"This whole thing is a beautiful gift," said Makiver, as she watched family, friends, and volunteers plant a white star magnolia tree, climbing clematis, zinnias, daylilies, delphinium, and other perennial and annual flowers in a 10-by-12-foot garden and around her patio.

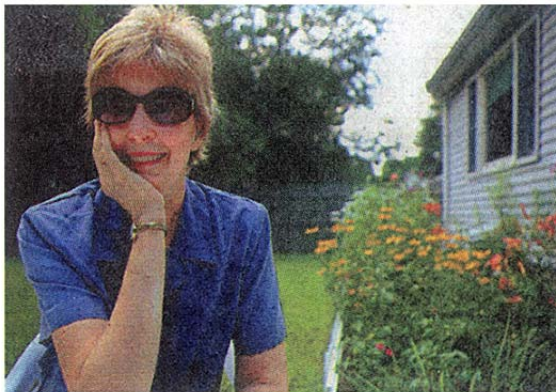
It all was thanks to Hope in Bloom, a nonprofit that since last summer has been planting gardens, and supplying patio and indoor plants, free to breast cancer patients in active treatment.

Makiver, 46, was treated for breast cancer last year and recently diagnosed with ovarian cancer, which means resuming chemotherapy.

"It's another battle," said Makiver, adding the garden will be "a place I can relax in and enjoy, and actually learn more about gardening."

The Georgetown garden was the 41st planted around the state by the organization, including plots in Beverly, Wakefield, and Ipswich.

"Being or working in a garden lowers blood pressure, relieves stress, and reduces anxiety," said Roberta Dehman Hershon, founder of Hope in Bloom, based in Dedham. "In turn, these benefits allow us to regroup. It's especially important for people who are sick to have a positive outlook because



Clockwise from top left: Paula Cavallaro in her Beverly garden, where volunteers Roger Woosley and Charleen Maunsell plant flowers; Olivia Monroe helps Meghan, Jack, and Molly Makiver in the Georgetown garden created for Kathy Makiver.

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KATHY MAKIVER
Of her new garden

the body is apt to be more responsive to treatment and heal more quickly.”

She said the trend toward healing gardens at hospitals and other health facilities is proof of the power of greenery.

“Different from cut flowers, these gardens become constants in patients lives,” said Dr. Gerburg Wulf, of the Breast Care Program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. “The patients I’ve had who have had such a garden planted have found it comforting, healing, and truly pleasing. It’s really remarkable that there are volunteers out there who create these gardens for breast cancer patients.”

When Paula Cavallaro’s garden was planted in Beverly last year, the retired teacher and breast cancer patient thought, “I want to live to see this garden bloom.” And, she has.

“I wanted something colorful and pretty, with vibrant shades,” she said. “A birdhouse, too.”

“It’s good if you can get out and do

some of your own weeding and planting. Touching the soil and getting involved with nature grounds you. Life is a cycle. Flowers bloom and die and there are new shoots in the spring. It's a rebirth. It gives you hope."

Patients interested in a garden can contact Hope in Bloom, but often they are suggested by someone else. Two women, who didn't even know each other, nominated Makiver.

Landscape designers, who donate their time, meet with the recipients to talk about preferences in color, fragrance, and type of plants. And each garden is tailored to the person's lifestyle and gardening abilities. Hope in Bloom plants the garden and helps maintain it for a year.

Hershon said the group's biggest challenge is raising money, with the demand for gardens outweighing cash flow. Most of the plants are purchased wholesale, with costs ranging from \$200 for house plants to \$3,000 for an in-ground garden. Other plants may be donated by relatives and friends. The gardens usually have a bench or a water feature.

Charleen Maunsell of Potscapes in Georgetown designed and helped plant two Hope in Bloom gardens last year, as well as Makiver's. "It's rewarding when you know the happiness it brings them," Maunsell said. "The work is worth it."

Landscape designer Maria Wheeler of Topsfield, who donated a plan for a Beverly garden, said she's had many friends affected by breast cancer and given to charities. "Just writing the check isn't enough," she said. "There is nothing like giving of your time and sharing your passion for something. You get tenfold back in how you feel."

In addition to about a dozen volunteers, Makiver's daughters, ages 16, 13, and 10, and husband, Jack, worked in the yard. "This is an extraordinary effort these women are putting forth, and we can't thank them enough," said Jack Makiver. "I think my wife will get a lot of pleasure out of it."

Friend and volunteer Patti Prior saw something deeper taking root. "Kathy's showing her daughters that you forge ahead, and that's huge," she said. "I think seeing all her friends and family come together like this is a statement of how much people care about her. I think it will give her the strength to fight."

For information, call 781-381-3597 or go to hopeinbloom.org.