About the Owners
Tami and Terry Fowler – Paola/Hillsdale, Kansas

Terry and Tami purchased the home in 2017. “Integrity” was Terry’s guiding principle as he searched for archival photographs to use as models. The interior rooms, including the basement garage, were lovingly returned to their original configurations and finishes. Tami left her career in telecommunications to become a postal worker in Louisburg, giving her evenings and weekends to focus on the garden’s restoration. Her mother is an accomplished gardener with a huge greenhouse on her Paola city lot, so Tami had expert help. Her father was also an avid gardener. Although he specialized in cacti, he also consulted on the garden’s restoration, which now serves as his memorial.

About the Garden
First, the house was restored, then Tami and Terry turned their attention to the 1.5 acres of yard, which was completely overgrown. Reclaiming the original garden was like an archeological expedition to remove several feet of eroded soil. Digging revealed the outlines of flower beds in raised berms surrounded by flagstone walks and patios. A beautiful garden had once occupied this space! Restoring and enhancing the garden has been Tami’s passion for the past 6 years. Initially, ten tons of gravel were brought in as paths and mulch to control the eroding mud that would have re-buried the flagstone paths. Tami gardens without a written master plan, but the bones of the former garden provide guidance. The overall look is created by the contrasts in elevation between high raised berms and the lower flagstone paths weaving through the restored ravines. This is now a shade garden with the canopy provided by the Catalpa Trees that Tami planted. Terry is her partner in planning and executing the garden design, he builds much of the hardscaping and art and acts as the household engineer to keep all systems running, but he proudly does no planting!

Special Features
✦ A hidden solar-heated pool, surrounded by a tile and concrete deck and landscaped rock berms.
✦ An ancient greenhouse sits at the west side of the property providing workspace, storage and ambiance. The pool house has been re-modeled to serve as a house for their 21 YO daughter.
✦ Her grandfather’s wheelbarrow is in the front yard overflowing with colorful annuals every year.
✦ The garden comes alive in the evening with string lighting, which outlines the entire garden with a soft glow.
✦ Garden décor includes concrete and stone sculptures and wooden plaques.

Tami’s Favorite Plants
• Peonies were already planted to bloom in May for a colorful spring.
• A stunning collection of Elephant Ears dominates the gardens. Many of the varieties grow over 6 feet tall with three-foot-long leaves. They are dug and stored in peat moss over the winter.
• Many varieties of Hostas provide multiple textures and a contrast to the Elephant Ears.
• Impatients and begonias fill the raised beds with color.
• Coleus in every possible hue and varied heights add color and dimension.
• Liriope provides a low-maintenance grass-like edging for the beds.
• White-edged Morning Glories scramble among the raised beds.
• The climbing Red-flowered Cypress Vines (also a morning glory) also accentuate the varied elevations.
• Catalpa Trees provide shade for the Elephant Ears and Hosta.

Greatest Challenges
There are still drainage and erosion issues and water leaking around the pool rocks. Like all Kansas gardeners, Tami and Terry battle weeds and must water the garden beds during summer droughts. The need for colorful shade plants inspires Tami’s ongoing search to find new specimens, and the steep terrain dictates continuous erosion control. With five dogs, Tami has the additional challenge of protecting her plants, especially new specimens. Her clever solution? She “plants” a metal flower besides each new arrival, which marks its location plus provides protection since her pups don’t like gnawing on metal.
Elephant ear, *Colocasia esculenta*, is grown for its large tropical-looking foliage. Foliage colors include purple-black, green, and white/green variegated. The large, 3- to 5-foot-long heart shaped leaves are produced on 2- to 3-foot-long petioles (leaf stalks). Elephant ears are normally grown from large, round to oval, brown tubers or from rooted plants. The tubers can be placed directly outdoors between 2 and 3 inches deep after the danger of frost has passed (mid-May in Kansas) or started indoors in large pots in March. Elephant ears perform best in moist soils so heavy mulching is helpful to retain moisture.

They are also heavy feeders. Apply a slow-release fertilizer to the soil and periodically fertilize with a water-soluble product. Elephant ears thrive in partial shade but can also be grown in full sun if it is kept consistently moist. Elephant ears can be used as background plants in flower beds and as marginal plants around ponds. Elephant ears can also be grown in large containers. Water and feed plants in containers and beds regularly during dry weather.

Many new selections have been introduced onto the market over the past few years and are available as tubers from specialty nurseries. Below are some of the more popular varieties and their descriptions.

- 'Black Magic' - burgundy-black foliage, 3 to 5 feet tall.
- 'Black Stem' - deep green foliage with burgundy-black veins and stems 3 to 5 feet tall.
- 'Chicago Harlequin' - green foliage randomly blotched with lighter green and, 2 to 5 feet tall.
- 'Cranberry Taro' - green foliage with dark stems, 3 to 4 feet tall.
- 'Green Giant' - large green foliage, 3 to 5 feet tall.
- 'Illustris' - green foliage is overlaid with black and has lime green veins and margins, 1 to 3 feet tall.
- 'Lime Zinger' - chartreuse green foliage, 5 to 6 feet tall.
- 'Nancy's Revenge' - dark green foliage with creamy white centers 2 to 5 feet tall.

In Kansas, Elephant Ears will not survive the winter outdoors. Usually the plant is dug in the fall and stored indoors over winter as a dormant tuber or kept alive in a greenhouse. Cut the plants back to within 2 to 4 inches of the ground a few days after the first frost. Carefully dig the plants with a spade or potato fork. To store as a tuber allow the base to dry for a week so they are dry to the touch and peel off the remaining stem tissue. Store in peat moss or vermiculite in the coolest part of the house, typically the basement or a crawlspace.

Because of our short growing season, Elephant ears may not form large tubers or store sufficient food reserves in the swollen base to successfully survive the winter in storage. Instead, repotted plants and container grown plants can be overwintered by keeping them alive in an area with grow-lights and moisture.