Frances Hodgson Burnett writes in her classic, *The Secret Garden*, “At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago.” If Burnett observed Olof and Helene Hult’s wildly colorful garden today, she would more than likely reflect on their garden’s whimsical beauty and note that the beauty created became even more impressive simply because the Hult’s took it upon themselves to plant a drought tolerant landscape. As ecologically aware Los Angeles residents, Olof and Helene inspire, give us hope, and allow us to see, as Burnett suggests, “what can be done” and what we in Cheviot Hills can do to help preserve our valuable water resource.

It’s an 80 degree December day and Olof Hult works steadily cutting back the parkway’s pink-flowered Gaura lindheimeri. His front garden explodes with color from South Africa’s Jester Gaura, and the deep green Ceanothus, California’s native Lilac. As ecologically aware Los Angeles residents, Olof and Helene inspire, give us hope, and allow us to see, as Burnett suggests, “what can be done” and what we in Cheviot Hills can do to help preserve our valuable water resource.

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Olof and Helene, both Swedes by birth and baptized in the same local church, met and married in the US, then fell in love with designing a climate-appropriate California garden. “She would say ‘the beauty created became even more impressive simply because the Hult’s took it upon themselves to plant a drought tolerant landscape. As ecologically aware Los Angeles residents, Olof and Helene inspire, give us hope, and allow us to see, as Burnett suggests, ‘what can be done’ and what we in Cheviot Hills can do to help preserve our valuable water resource.”

Olof chuckles as he reflects back on the housing crash of 2007, “More than once the doorbell would ring and it was a real estate agent looking for inventory. We’d been so busy remodeling our interior that our yard looked as if no one was home.” They killed the lawn in spring and hired men to scrape and ready the soil. With calculated changes in water usage as the goal, Helene’s garden mantra came into play. “She would say ‘the first year the garden sleeps, the second it creeps, and the third it leaps’ to remind us to be patient,” says Olof, “all with only 20% usage of our total water volume.” The garden now leaping with “self maintenance and the neighbor plant can grow over the other.” Yet the parkway Gaura, one of their favorite finds, are cut back to insure bloom. Olof even discovered Gaura for sale near his family’s summer home in Sweden. He grins, “We’ll see if it makes it through a Swedish winter.”

Beauty by definition can be subjective as can the ‘beauty’ of a garden, and therefore the beauty of a landscape is often more than we can see. The Hults have shown us that beauty is smart. The combined drought tolerant plantings act as a hummingbird mecca, a Monarch sanctuary, and the Hult’s way of rescuing a bit of California. And most importantly, it thrives as Helene’s living memory. What they created in Cheviot Hills can be done by all of us everywhere. ‘If you look the right way,’ Frances Hodgson Burnett muses, ‘you can see that the whole world is a garden.’

**OLOF’S Garden**

Written By: Katrina L. Coombs | Garden: Olof Hult

Olof and Helene Hult's story is a testament to the beauty that can be created even in a region that is not naturally suited for plant life. Their garden illustrates the importance of being environmentally conscious and how simple changes in water usage can lead to a more sustainable landscape.

The Hults have shown us that beauty is not only aesthetically pleasing but also practical. Their garden serves as a sanctuary for hummingbirds and monarch butterflies, demonstrating the importance of biodiversity in our landscapes. By reducing water usage, they have shown that it is possible to create a beautiful garden with minimal impact on the environment.

The Hults’ garden is a reminder that beauty can be found everywhere and that even in areas with less-than-ideal conditions, creative solutions can lead to stunning results. Their story is a call to action for all of us to consider the impact of our landscaping choices and to strive for sustainability in our gardening practices.