

Small space big impression

A 49-square-foot lanai is enough for an "oasis" in the middle of Honolulu

By Christie Wilson

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Pam Chambers admits paying "zero attention" to her yard while living in a spacious Niu Valley home for 27 years. But after moving to a tiny studio apartment downtown four years ago, she seems to have sprouted a green thumb.

Her 49-square-foot lanai at Honua•kaha on Queen Street is lined with potted ferns, small trees and 20 orchid plants.

Chambers, 63, a "presentation coach" who is hired by employers, organizations and individuals to teach public speaking, networking and etiquette skills, said she had all sorts of reasons for not working on her yard in Niu Valley: It would attract mosquitoes, she didn't have garden tools, the "scraggly" landscape was just too far gone.

But the smaller space at her 510-square-foot studio was more manageable.

"When I moved in, it seemed like a real possibility to have plants," said Chambers, a tall, slender woman with a stylish wardrobe that includes an assortment of 40 hats.



She started with three potted plants but decided "they looked too meager and pitiful. I needed to populate this space with more plants."

At first she was limited by the size of what she could carry in her Mini Cooper sedan, but when she realized her lanai wouldn't be complete without some bigger trees, she called an acquaintance, landscape architect Stephen Haus.

Haus delivered several trees to Chambers' apartment: a ficus benjamina and three ficus alii, a fairly new hybrid first cultivated in Hawaii. It has long, narrow foliage that resembles bamboo leaves. She also has a neem tree — her favorite because it grew from a 6-inch keiki into a gangly, 10-foot-tall specimen that she just cut back.

Her collection of orchid plants was accumulated over time from a vendor at the Fort Street Mall farmers market.

Like a true gardener, Chambers takes satisfaction and pride in her efforts.

"It's a thrill for me to see new life without doing much more than watering and fertilizing on occasion," she said. "It also allows me to be creative."

On clear evenings she sits on a bar stool on her lanai, leaning back against the wall and looking out through what she calls her protective curtain of plants and onto a much bigger expanse of greenery from the Kawai•aha'ō Church cemetery across the street.

"I can see other people but they can't see me. It doesn't feel like I'm in a city. It's like an oasis," Chambers said.

Other times, when she walks on the opposite side of the street, she likes to look up at her second-floor lanai.

"I can see the foliage that I created, and I hope it's pleasing to other passers-by."

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Pam Chambers tends her narrow lanai garden at her condo. She said she spends a lot of time sitting on her bar stool and enjoying her garden and the view. She says she also loves her hats, as she has around 40 of them, including the one she is wearing.



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Chambers' collection of orchid plants has accumulated over time from a vendor at the Fort Street Mall farmers market.



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Chambers cleans white spots off her plant's leaves.



DENNIS ODA / DODA@STARADVERTISER.COM Pam Chambers waters one of her potted plants. Her 49-square-foot lanai contains potted ferns, small trees and 20 orchid plants.