AWARD WINNING

THE DIBBLER

SPRING 2025

UNIQUE GARDENS

OHS | Ottawa Horticultural Society

OTTAWA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Ottawahort.org

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The *OHS Dibbler* won the

Judge's Choice Award

in the Publications Competition at the Ontario Horticultural Association's 2024 Convention.

The Book Nook

TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR OHS MEMBERS

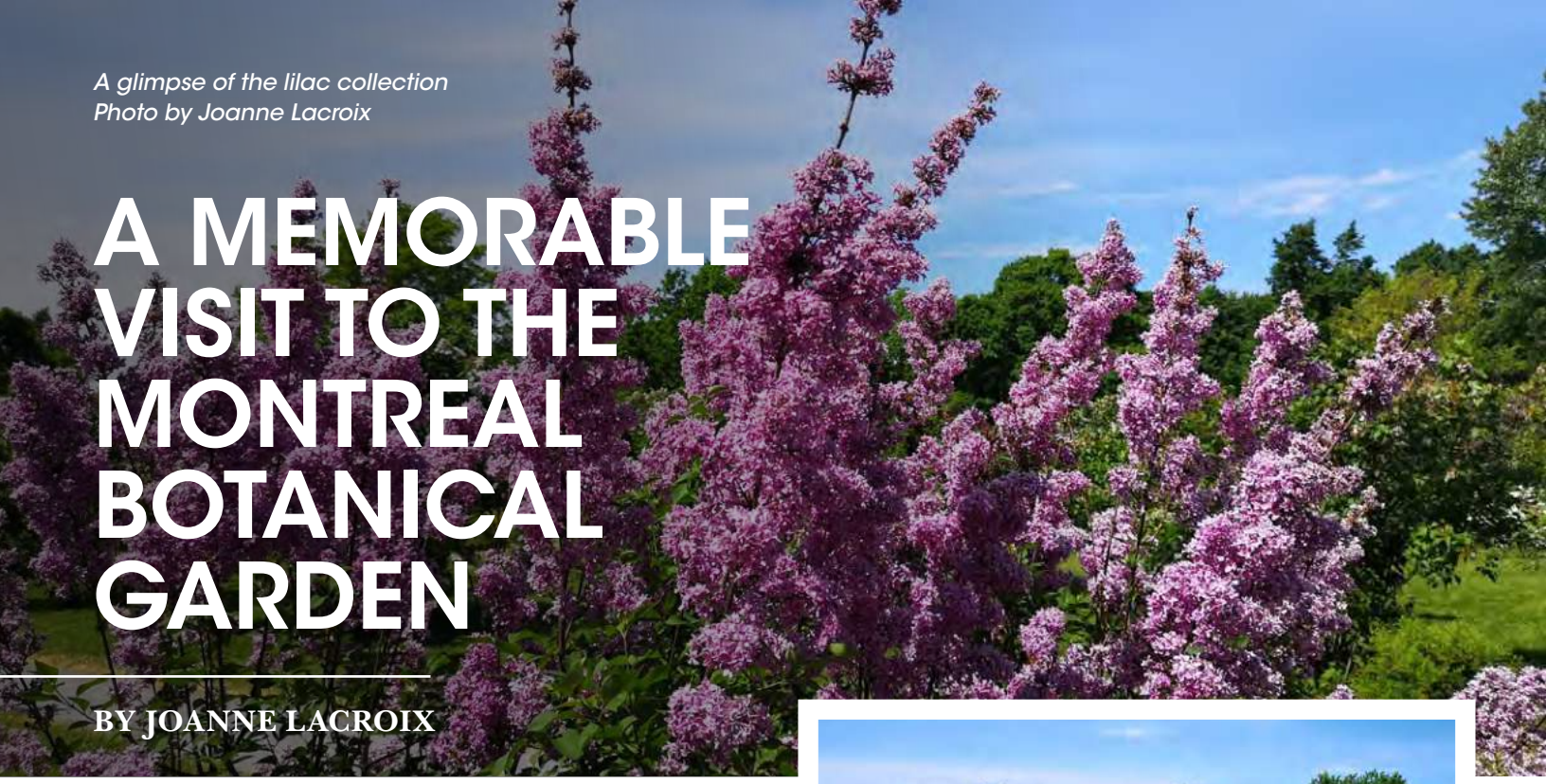
Ottawa Public Library / Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa

The Collection Development staff at the Ottawa Public Library have specially selected a list of materials related to gardening for OHS members. The list features titles in English and French recently added to the OPL's collections.

Among the titles for this issue are materials relating to:

- ✓ Garden architecture
- ✓ Garden sustainability and green design
- ✓ Flower gardening and arranging
- ✓ Landscaping and garden design
- ✓ Environmental conservation and protection
- ✓ Garden furnishings
- ✓ Vegetable and herb gardening
- ✓ Sweet peas
- ✓ Flowers in cooking
- ✓ Gardening tools
- ✓ Historic English gardens and designers
- ✓ Gardening with children

Click on the link below to see the complete list from the Library. This also allows you to view availability and place a hold from the link.
https://ottawa.bibliocommons.com/list/share/354296247_collections_oplbpo/2734386687_ottawa_horticultural_society_spring_titles



A glimpse of the lilac collection
Photo by Joanne Lacroix

A MEMORABLE VISIT TO THE MONTREAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

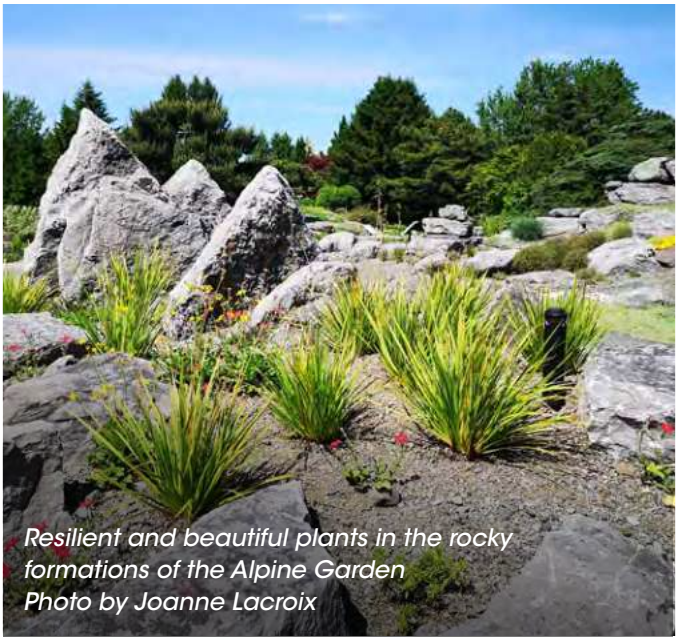
BY JOANNE LACROIX

With spring approaching, I found myself reminiscing about a wonderful visit to the Montreal Botanical Garden in May 2024. The gardens were alive with colour, the air filled with the scent of fresh blooms, and every path invited exploration.

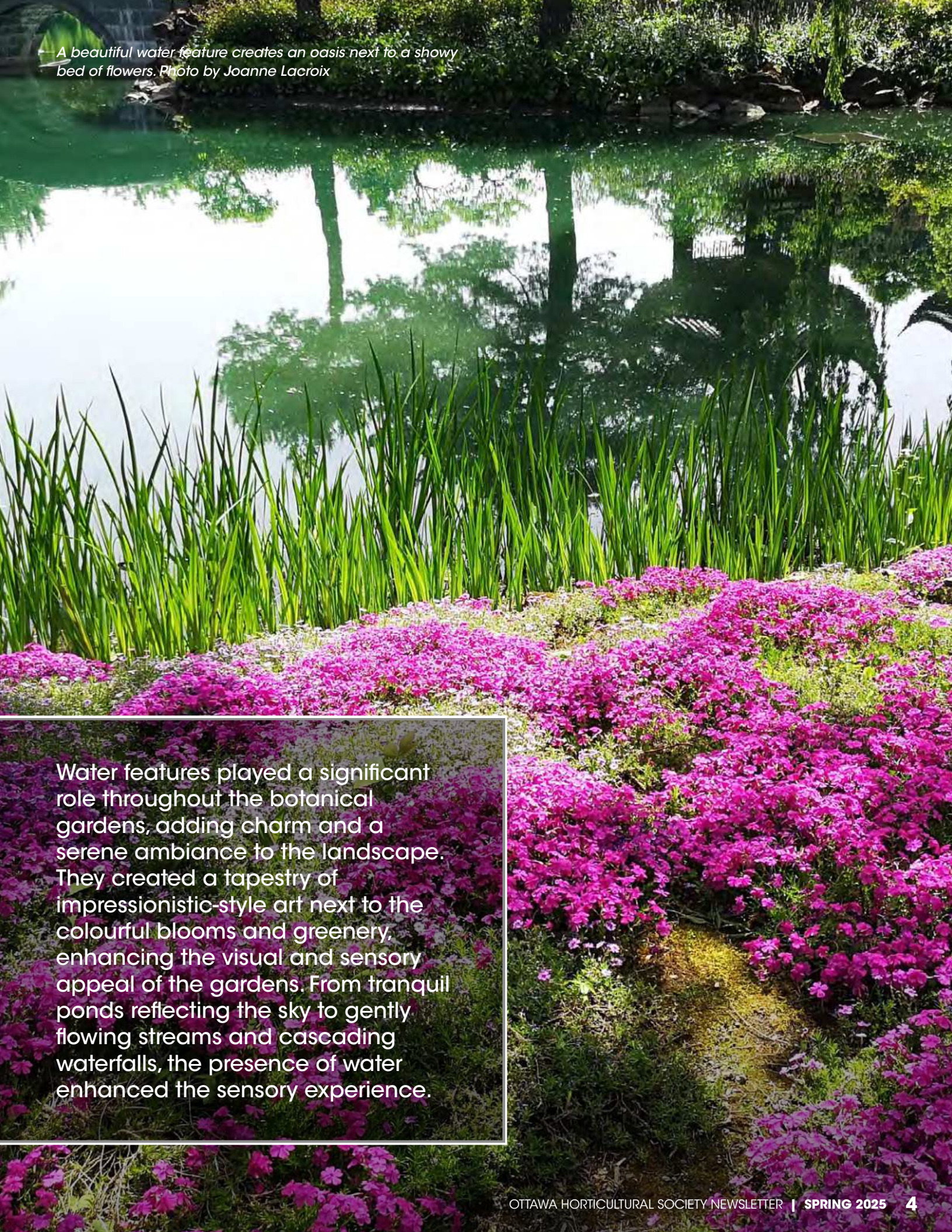
Established in 1931, the garden spans 75 hectares, making it one of the most renowned botanical gardens in the world. This property includes 20 thematic gardens, each offering a unique perspective on horticulture and culture. Among them, the Chinese, Japanese, and First Nations Gardens stood out, blending natural beauty with rich traditions and storytelling.

One of the most memorable sights during my visit was the stunning collection of lilac trees in full bloom. The delicate blossoms of the approximately 400 specimens of a dozen different varieties painted the landscape in shades of purple, pink and white, while their sweet fragrance filled the air. Despite my severe allergy to lilacs, I couldn't help but appreciate their stunning beauty. Visitors couldn't resist getting up close to breathe in the flowers' scent, pausing to take in the simple joy of nature. It was the perfect spot to linger, perhaps even enjoy a picnic beneath the trees, surrounded by beauty and tranquility.

Nearby, the Alpine Garden presented a fascinating array of hardy plants thriving in meticulously designed and natural-looking rock formations, showcasing the resilience and beauty ranging from mountain flora to the boreal regions around the world. This display transported me back to a previous experience where I enjoyed a rugged, rocky hillside where various types of greenery and drought-resistant plants managed to find their home in the arid conditions. The amazing resilience and adaptive qualities of alpine, subalpine as well as arctic and subarctic plants were featured very well in this amazing showcase. These gardens also included a mineralogical garden that featured many varieties of rocks displayed in very original ways. This was a real treat for me, as both a gardening and rock enthusiast.



Resilient and beautiful plants in the rocky formations of the Alpine Garden
Photo by Joanne Lacroix



A beautiful water feature creates an oasis next to a showy bed of flowers. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

Water features played a significant role throughout the botanical gardens, adding charm and a serene ambiance to the landscape. They created a tapestry of impressionistic-style art next to the colourful blooms and greenery, enhancing the visual and sensory appeal of the gardens. From tranquil ponds reflecting the sky to gently flowing streams and cascading waterfalls, the presence of water enhanced the sensory experience.

The Chinese Garden offers a unique and tranquil setting. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

Nowhere was this more evident than in the iconic Japanese and Chinese Gardens, where traditional pagodas and structures overlooked still waters, waterfalls and little footbridges which led visitors through the promenade highlighted with artfully arranged landscapes of bonsai, conifers, flowering crabapple trees, and over 30 species of bamboo.

The architectural elements and hardscaping were equally impressive throughout the expansive property, with carefully designed pathways and stonework creating the sense of individual garden "rooms" on the large property. Meandering through the space felt like stepping into different worlds, each with its own character and mood. Beautifully crafted pergolas, archways, trellises, sculptures and little bridges provided structure and framed breathtaking views of the gardens beyond.

Adding to the serene, yet lively atmosphere, numerous exhibitors were on site, offering an array of native and exotic plants, unique botanically inspired crafts, and garden accessories. Visitors had the opportunity to speak with horticulturists, meet producers and regional craftspeople. There were opportunities to sit in on informative presentations or even take part in hands-on workshops, making the visit both educational and interactive.

A pathway in a shaded area leads visitors to further exploration. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

The Montreal Botanical Garden in May is truly a delight. With its perfect balance of natural beauty, water features, and thoughtful design, it offers a memorable escape for plant lovers and casual visitors alike. Although the greenhouses were not open to the public during my visit, this only gives me another great reason to return. With so much to see and experience, this special place offers opportunities for endless discovery, learning and enjoyment.

I highly recommend a visit to this remarkable horticultural treasure. Not only is it a delight to the senses, but it is also a wonderful inspiration for the incoming gardening season.

Source: Facts regarding the Montreal Botanical Garden: www.espacepourlavie.ca

Cabbage interplanted with grass

PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPING:

A HOLISTIC CONNECTION WITH THE LAND

BY TINA LIU

When we think of landscaping, our minds often wander to colourful gardens, neatly trimmed hedges, and vibrant flowers. These traditional greenspaces are undeniably beautiful, but productive landscaping encourages us to see our outdoor areas through a different lens—one that focuses not only on visual appeal but also on functionality and sustainability. This year, the national garden theme for *Communities in Bloom* is Edible Gardens, which aligns perfectly with this idea, inviting us to rethink our outdoor spaces.

Communities in Bloom is a national program that encourages communities to enhance their green spaces and improve environmental sustainability. It brings people together to beautify their surroundings, promote environmental stewardship, and foster civic pride. Communities participate in friendly competitions, with awards given to those demonstrating exceptional efforts in areas such as environmental action, heritage conservation, landscaping, tree management, and community engagement. The program helps build stronger, more vibrant, and greener communities.

It's about creating landscapes that serve multiple purposes - beyond decoration - by integrating the principles of ethnobotany, the study of how plants are used across various cultures for food, medicine, tools, and other needs. In a productive landscape, plants do more than just beautify the space; they serve as resources for nourishment, sustenance, healing, crafting of everyday objects, and even building materials. This approach creates a deeper connection with the land, making gardens truly multifunctional and sustainable.

The concept of productive landscaping is deeply rooted in history, with different cultures around the world using plants for more than just decoration. Indigenous communities, ancient civilizations, and early agricultural societies viewed the land as a resource for food, shelter, tools, and medicines, with ethnobotany at the heart of their practices. Techniques like companion planting, crop rotation, and polyculture were common, helping to improve soil fertility, reduce pests, and enhance resilience. Civilizations such as the Aztec, Maya, and Inca employed these strategies, and Indigenous peoples in North America developed techniques like the Three Sisters farming method, where corn, beans, and squash are grown together to support each other, conserve moisture, and suppress weeds, creating sustainable and productive landscapes.

At its core, productive landscaping emphasizes the edible potential of most plants. Unlike traditional gardens, which often separate ornamentals from food, modern landscapes blend them. Edible plants like rhubarb, asparagus, and raspberry bushes become perennial residents, reducing the need for replanting and ensuring a long-term food supply. Herbs like thyme, mint, and chives offer culinary flavour, medicinal value, and pest deterrence, while wild edibles like dandelions, nettles, and elderberries provide diversity and nutrition, turning the garden into a continuous source of food year-round. The global COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of food security, prompting many of us to revisit and learn about growing our own food.

Companion planting is essential to productive landscaping, creating a balanced ecosystem where plants benefit each other in various


Artichoke


Brussels Sprouts & Salvia


Brussels Sprouts & Salvia


Commissioners Park
Three Sisters


Kale, grass &
artichoke


Curly Kale

ways. For example, basil planted with tomatoes enhances the flavour of the fruit and helps repel harmful pests, promoting healthier growth. By understanding plant interactions, gardeners can reduce the need for artificial fertilizers and pesticides, fostering a more sustainable environment. Additionally, productive landscapes can control pests naturally by incorporating plants with pest-repellent properties, such as marigolds, which deter aphids, and garlic and onions, which repel various insects. This strategy reduces reliance on synthetic pesticides, ensuring healthier crops and a thriving, balanced ecosystem. Plants can also be used to attract beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, which prey on aphids, and parasitic wasps, which control pest populations, further enhancing natural pest defense in the garden.

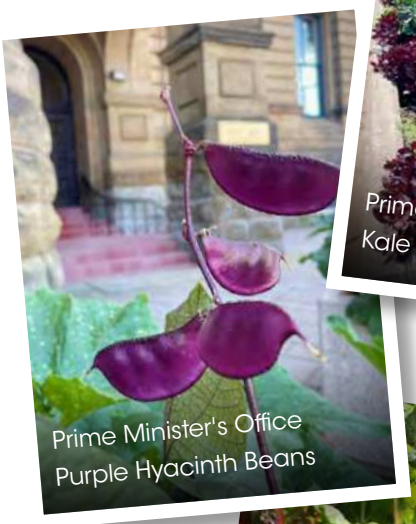
Incorporating plants into building and crafting materials is another facet of productive landscaping. Plants such as willow and hazel can be woven into fences, baskets, and structures, while cedar offers durable wood for construction. Fibers from plants like hemp and straw are used for textiles and other materials. I've seen a stunning living fence made by weaving willow stems in a hardiness zone 5 region that became the garden's centerpiece. This approach encourages the use of natural, renewable resources, reducing our reliance on synthetic materials and promoting sustainability.

Another often-overlooked function of plants is their ability to provide natural dyes and pigments. For centuries, people have used plants to create vibrant colours for textiles and crafts. Indigo, madder, and elderflowers are just a few examples of plants that can be cultivated not only for their beauty but also for their ability to produce rich, natural dyes. Growing your own dye plants gives you the freedom to experiment with colours and create eco-friendly fabrics, artwork, or even home decor. This approach not only supports creativity but also fosters a deeper connection to the natural world.

Perhaps the most profound aspect of productive landscaping is its ability to provide healing plants for medicine. Many plants have powerful medicinal properties that can be used for natural remedies. Aloe vera soothes burns and skin irritations, echinacea supports the immune system,


Wild berries for wildlife


Prime Minister's Office
Kale and Cauliflower


Prime Minister's Office
Purple Hyacinth Beans


Swiss Chard


Rideau Hall Apple Tree Espalier


Purple Cauliflower with Zinnia

and lavender helps reduce stress. Growing these plants in your garden offers access to a natural pharmacy, allowing you to create herbal teas, infused oils, and salves for a range of ailments. This practice promotes wellness and reduces reliance on pharmaceutical products. Personally, I've used plants from my own garden to infuse oils for making soap and cream, a journey that began when my firstborn's stubborn eczema led me to explore the healing potential of plants. The traditional wisdom surrounding plant-based healing is endlessly fascinating.

When we bring all these elements together in a garden, we begin to see outdoor spaces in a new light. Rather than simply admiring the beauty of our plants, we tap into their numerous benefits—food, medicine, materials, and natural pest control. This approach encourages us to view our gardens as places that nourish, heal, and spark creativity, while also promoting sustainability and a deeper connection with nature. By embracing productive landscaping, we can create spaces that are not only visually attractive but also functional and sustainable, benefiting both us and the environment.

As a landscape architect, I work on planting designs for major projects that often require planning 12 to 18 months in advance. This summer, you'll find over 200 different plant varieties in the federal parks of the National Capital Region. But when it comes to my own garden, I'll admit—I'm a bit of a lazy gardener. Early spring is when I usually plan my summer garden. I mainly have perennials with some pockets for annual flowers, veggies, and herbs, plus bulbs like tulips underneath so I get blooms throughout the growing season. This year, I'm planting with even more intention, considering how my garden can serve multiple purposes. Are you ready to embrace this nationwide theme and make your garden both beautiful and productive?


Firecracker Chili


Guild Planting


The Three sisters


Bulls Blood Beets


Red Banana Tree


Perennial Basil


Rideau Hall Apple Tree Espalier


Prime Minister's Office Squash Beans

CANADENSIS NATIVE TREE PROJECT

BY JEAN CARR

Canadensis tree nursery in the early fall of 2023, with new trees grown from seeds collected in the spring from healthy local trees. Buttonwood/ American sycamore (Platanus occidentalis), catalpa, and sweetgum (Liquidambar styraciflua, in the foreground lit by sunlight) are among the many species. Photo by Jean Carr

Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.

- Warren Buffett

The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now.

- Anonymous

A Growing Crisis

A growing crisis threatens our native trees and the Ottawa tree canopy. Contributing factors to this crisis are:

- Urban expansion and territory encroachment make it increasingly difficult for trees to propagate naturally and, as a result, many are on a path to becoming endangered.
- There are about 75 native tree species in Ottawa and eastern Ontario, but perhaps only up to a dozen or so are commonly available at local nurseries.
- When there is a confrontation between humans and trees, the trees always lose. The loss of trees in Hunt Club Woods and at the Arboretum due to the new hospital development are two of many such situations that come to mind.
- Infestations such as the Emerald Ash Borer, Dutch Elm disease, hemlock woolly adelgid, spotted lanternfly, and spongy moth pose threats to native trees.

Considering these factors carefully, it becomes evident why our tree canopy is facing significant challenges, resulting in thinning, population loss, weakened trees and decline. At worst, this situation could lead to a grave and unsustainable ecological imbalance. Action is required to address this crisis.

The Successful Proof of Concept Project

In response, in 2022, the Canadensis Botanical Garden Society, in cooperation with the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC), undertook a native tree initiative to help reverse biodiversity loss among our native trees.

We have developed a straightforward methodology for cultivating indigenous trees from locally gathered seeds. Seeds collected from local and robust native trees will yield trees more adapted to our climate, resulting in more resilient trees with a heightened probability of survival. In addition, Canadensis created a native tree nursery at its site.

OFNC led several seed collecting excursions in the spring of 2022. Approximately 70 volunteers, including members of Scout Troops, participated. As a result, 250 new trees were successfully grown in the Canadensis tree nursery, and perhaps an additional 50 trees at the residences of some of the excursion participants.

Partnering to Amplify Successes

Encouraged by our early successes, we sought to continue and expand the project. We also recognized that the full potential of our methodology could only be realized through collaboration with partners and the community.

- Based on the success of the 2022 Proof of Concept, the City of Ottawa has provided funding to expand the initiative. This funding is enabling the expansion of the tree nursery at Canadensis.
- OFNC is scheduling seed collection excursions for 2025.
- Individuals within the community (unaffiliated with any organization) have volunteered and have provided seeds from trees on their properties.
- The Ottawa Horticultural Society is supporting the project, and over 15 members are growing trees from seeds at their homes.
- Wild Pollinator Partners are providing knowledgeable assistance for prioritizing species.
- In January 2024, members of the Gloucester Horticultural Society also began to participate in the project.
- GardeningCalendar is prototyping a registration system to efficiently manage the inventory and market new trees to the community.
- The Ottawa Wildflower Seed Library is collaborating on seed exchanges.

How can you help?

There are many ways individuals can assist our response to this crisis:

Collect seeds

- Participate in OFNC-led seed collecting excursions.
- Collect seeds from trees, perhaps on your property, perhaps in other areas, and supply them.

Growing seeds

- Grow trees from seeds in pots at your home.
- Consider becoming an expert for one or more tree species; read as much as you can on how to grow and propagate your favourite species, which can be from seeds and other methods.
- Offer your expertise to others in the community.

Identify community projects and locations to place trees

- Join community outreach initiatives, whether with community groups, schools, hospitals, hospices, and so forth to identify possible locations for planting young seedlings.

Training and leadership

- Volunteer for a leadership role in the management of this project.
- Help with inventory management.
- Become a leader of seed collection excursions.

Education and support

- Offer to provide support to others who might have questions in growing their seeds.
- Get involved in education and transfer of skills. Teach others how to do this.
- There is a need for training of the next generation of native tree experts, as well as training of volunteers in native tree seed collection and propagation.

BONUS OPPORTUNITY:

Orphan trees

A number of people have contacted us to say, "I have [this type of tree] growing [in my yard or at this location] and it needs to be moved because it's going to be too big for that location. Instead of cutting it down, can I offer it to others in the community?"

If we have enough volunteers, we can offer this service to the community.

Final comment

If you are passionate about trees and this project, please contact us: Jean Carr (jcarr@jardincanadensisgarden.ca) and Kathleen Fischer (kfischer888@outlook.com)

And plant a tree today! Somebody will be in the shade in 20 years - it might be you!

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RBG Rock Garden
Photo by Larry Chamney

BEHIND THE SCENES AT

THE ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Part 2

BY LARRY CHAMNEY

In 2023, I was the successful silent auction bidder on a membership to the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) for two, including a 'behind-the-scenes' day tour with senior RBG staff. RBG is Canada's largest botanical garden and is a horticultural and ecological treasure nestled within the Hamilton-Burlington urbanized area.

This article is the second of a 2-part series that reflects some of my experiences at the Gardens in June 2024. Part 2 highlights my visit to the Rose Garden and the Rock Garden, two garden areas within RBG that have recently undergone significant rejuvenation in response to the need for development of sustainable horticulture.

Hendrie Park and the Rose Garden

Hendrie Park Gardens is a must-see for visitors. Twelve themed garden areas contain over 1,400 types and over 55,000 individual plants, within a 9-hectare area. Specific mention can be made of the Healing Garden (showcasing medicinal plants), Native Plant Garden, White Garden, Scented Garden (Chinese flowering dogwood was especially fragrant at the time of our visit!), and the Woodland Garden.

However, it is the Rose Garden that is the star attraction of Hendrie Park. At the time of our June visit, the roses were in full bloom and presented us with a colourful and fragrant welcome to RBG. There are over 300 varieties of rose (more than 3,400 individual plants) growing alongside companion plants such as lavender, dill, coneflower, yarrow, phlox, and allium. During our June visit, the allium were in peak bloom and complemented the roses in a colourful, almost whimsical manner. It was a photographer's dream!

However, things have not always been so 'rosy'. My hosts, Dr. David Galbraith (RBG Science Director) and senior RBG staffer Jan Graves, noted that the original rose garden had opened in 1967. By 2009, however, the disease-prone collections were suffering badly from the effects of detrimental insects, black spot *(Diplocarpon rosae)*, and encroaching shade trees, and could no longer be maintained in good health. A decision was taken to completely tear up the garden and rebuild it from scratch.

The new garden was completed in 2018 and comprises a series of discrete beds, centred around a reflecting water pond feature. The outer ring of beds portrays the historical development of garden roses, while inner beds feature 21st-century roses selected for their hardiness, disease resistance, fragrance and beauty. Annual and perennial companion plants are intermixed in the beds to complement the roses, extend the garden bloom season, and attract beneficial insects. At the time of our visit, companion species such as allium, cranesbill and lady's mantle were particularly dominant. It makes for a very beautiful garden setting!

We watched teams of staff and volunteers on site using a very detailed scoring system to assess resistance to black spot, bloom abundance, and fragrance of various rose types. David noted that the results are used to determine whether particular cultivars will be retained in the garden collection or replaced. David also noted that RBG hopes to share the information with the public once more data is compiled. *(Now if they could just turn their attention to tomato blossom-end rot!).*

The Rock Garden

The Rock Garden opened to visitors in 1932 and is considered the birthplace of the Royal Botanical Gardens. It was built in an abandoned gravel pit,

RBG Rock Garden
Photo by Larry Chamney

Reflecting Pond - Rose Garden.
Photo by Larry Chamney

Beauty in the Rose Garden.
Photo by Larry Chamney

using limestone rock from the Niagara Escarpment and 45,000 perennial plants, shrubs and conifers. As such, the rock garden was not your conventional alpine garden but rather a quarry garden, akin to the Quarry Garden in Butchart Gardens, Victoria. Nevertheless, by all accounts it was a beautiful setting with heritage gardens set amongst winding paths.

By the early 2000s, however, the gardens were suffering from insect and fungal disease, and pathways and other 1930s-era infrastructure needed improvement. A decision was taken to significantly rejuvenate the garden with a focus on new trends in sustainable garden design and management.

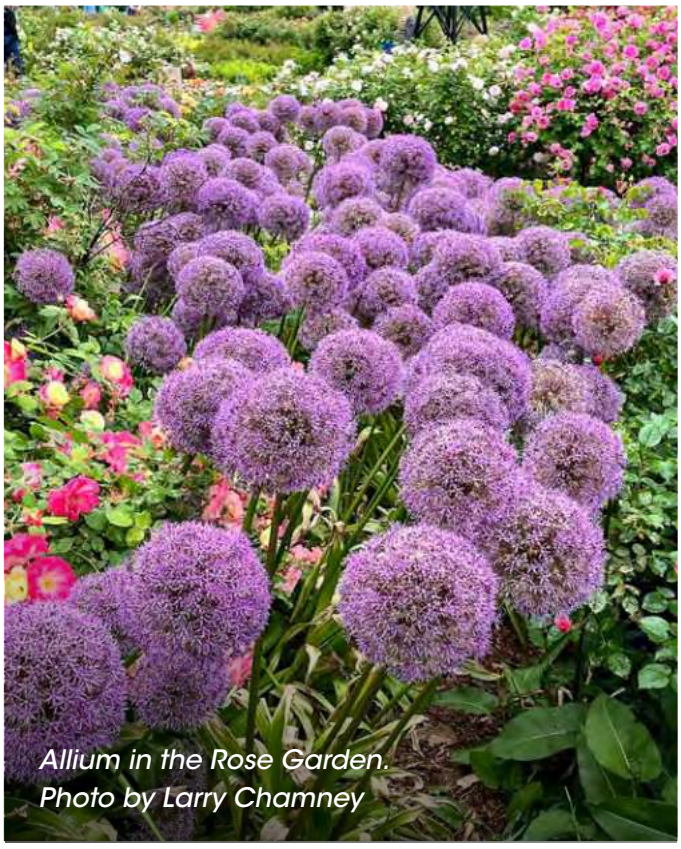
The new garden opened in 2016 and is a delight. The garden features a year-round perennial display of colour and textures, with maximal green space. Plants consist primarily of pollinator-friendly and drought-tolerant species native to Ontario. The approximately 2,400 species and over 143,000 individual plants include herbaceous perennials, grasses, shrubs and trees (mostly conifers). Hosta lovers will enjoy the more than 50 different types of hosta on display.

A major water feature has its origin as a waterfall at one end of the garden that feeds a stream that meanders through the garden to a pool at the opposite end; it is a lovely complement to the

RBG Rock Garden. Photo by Larry Chamney

surrounding vegetation. At the time of our June visit, the stream was edged with broad, colourful swaths of grasses, allium, astilbe, *Penstemon, Gillenia,* and *Achillea*, to name a few species. Accessible, well-lit pathways wind through the gardens, offering colourful and varied views at each turn, while calm music plays through an artfully hidden sound system. There is even a 750-metre-long 'Tree Mindfulness Walk' for those into 'forest-bathing.'

We ended our 3-day visit to RBG with a final stroll through this delightful garden, a fitting finale to an overall wonderful botanical experience. For those wishing to experience the Gardens, RBG has an excellent website to help plan your visit, including information on what is currently in bloom (https://www.rbg.ca).



Allium in the Rose Garden. Photo by Larry Chamney

Long-legged fly on hemerocallis
Photo by Nancy McDonald

GOING ON A

"BUG" HUNT

BY NANCY MCDONALD

With "Going on a Bear Hunt" lyrics in mind and substituting the word bug for bear, this daily hunt has become a morning garden routine for me. In the past, I concentrated my daily garden inspection on looking for new blooms and monitoring for signs of pests or diseases. It delighted me to watch the bees on my *Monarda fistulosa* and unexpectedly find an Eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly on my *Oenothera*. After reading Jessica Walliser's *"Attracting Beneficial Bugs to Your Garden,"* I realized I wasn't looking closely enough to see what other insects were visiting my garden and how important it is to attract beneficials as a natural pest management strategy. It is essential to celebrate and protect pollinators for their roles in our gardens and in agriculture, but also to appreciate the contribution of other beneficials such as wasps, flies, beetles and spiders.

Gardeners hearing the word wasp often think this is an undesirable insect to have in the garden. You will think differently as you learn about parasitoid wasps. Most parasitoids are tiny (0.3 mm to 4 mm long) and that is why you may not have noticed them in your garden. But I assure you, they are there.

Goldenrod crab spider on daisy
Photo by Nancy McDonald

The braconid parasitoid wasps (family Braconidae) are small (2 to 8 mm), usually black, with their abdomen the same size as their combined head and thorax. They are described as stout whereas ichneumon parasitoid wasps (family Ichneumonidae) are more slender and usually larger (3 to 35 mm). What looks like a stinger on a female ichneumon is an ovipositor, usually longer than its body. On quick glance, when I first noticed an ichneumon in my garden, it was busy using its long antennae to sense prey. Chalcid parasitoid wasps (family Chalcididae) are dark-coloured, metallic blue or green and are the tiniest (usually less than 3 mm) of the three. Entomologists distinguish these three by the differences in wing venation. It should be noted that, in some species of chalcids, wings are very small or absent.

So, what makes these parasitoid wasp species a good thing in your garden? Most of these tiny wasps do not sting you. The ovipositor, a natural engineering marvel, is used to deposit eggs in or on larvae or pupae of garden pests such as cabbage loopers, cutworms, tomato hornworms, aphids, scale insects, mealy bugs, and whiteflies. It is a scenario akin to a classic science fiction movie! The eggs deposited by the female parasitoid wasp hatch and grow by devouring the host. Physiological adaptations of the parasitoid, such as accompanying viruses, suppress the immune system of the host, rendering it weakened and unable to fight this assault.

Flies are another group of beneficial insects in our gardens and I look particularly for tachinid and syrphid flies (families Tachinidae and Syrphidae). In your garden, if you see a medium-sized fly resembling a house fly with dark bristles over its body, you have found a tachinid. It is not pretty, and is unlikely to be found on posters raising money for an ecosystem campaign, but it should be. Every one of the 8,000 species of tachinid has a parasitic larval stage and will feed on common insect pests. Many of us have experienced Japanese beetles in our gardens and are aware of the introduced tachinid, the winsome fly *(Istocheta aldrichi)*, a natural predator. A white dot on the thorax of a Japanese beetle indicates an egg has been laid by this tachinid. Refrain from dropping that one into soapy water. As the egg hatches, the larva penetrates the body of the Japanese beetle and will consume it. Our Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton Facebook page has had members reporting they have seen these parasitized beetles in our area and that is a good thing!

Syrphid flies are also known as hover flies or flower flies and are beneficial in pollinating crops worldwide in their adult stage. We have over

400 species of hover fly in Ontario, and they can easily be mistaken for bees or wasps in your garden. In their larval stage they prey on pests such as aphids, scale, mites, mealy bugs, thrips, and others. They vary in size from 4 to 25 mm long. I am now noticing the smaller ones and marvel at how they can hover mid-flight like we see with hummingbirds. I was interested to learn from Jessica Walliser that "Females of several species are known to determine whether to lay eggs based on how many aphids are present in a colony. The number of eggs she lays is determined by her perception of a pest colony as fit to sustain her young." Mothering attributes indeed!

When gardeners hear the word beetles, their mind often goes to Japanese beetles or rose chafer beetles but most beetles in our gardens are beneficial. Take the ground beetles, which are mostly nocturnal and shelter in soil, under stones or tall grass during the day. When they come out at night they feast on insects like aphids, slugs, cutworms, and caterpillars. A beneficial indeed, commanding greater gardener respect. In Great Britain, farmers have beetle banks in their fields of grain crops to control pests such as aphids. Ontario research in apple orchards has found them to have a role in integrated pest management. Additional predatory beetles that we can find in our gardens are fireflies, ladybugs, rove beetles, soldier beetles and tiger beetles.

All of us delight in seeing the flashes of light that firefly beetles emit at night to attract mates. Sadly, fireflies are in decline due to habitat loss and light pollution. I saw flashes in my garden last summer and found one on a daisy, enjoying pollen and nectar, when I did not have my iPhone handy to take a photo. In the larval stage, fireflies feed on pests such as snails, slugs, and cutworms.

Ladybugs have been a favourite for many of us as we remember the nursery rhyme "Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home." They are found in a diversity of colours with spots from few to many to none. All ladybugs feed on aphids, small caterpillars, scale, mealy bugs and mites. In an example of intraguild predation, the introduced Asian ladybugs outcompete our native ladybugs by killing and consuming them. It is important for gardeners to recognize the larval stage of ladybugs as they are small and alligator-like in

Syrphid fly on monarda leaf
Photo by Nancy McDonald

appearance and beneficial at this stage as they feed on pests.

Spiders are arachnids and a group of beneficials I am starting to both look for and appreciate in my garden. We have a fear of spiders as some are dangerous to humans but most just ignore us. They are characterised as curatorial (hunting) or web-forming. When I was a new gardener, I often removed those spider webs to tidy up when I was deadheading, not recognizing the benefit. The web-forming spiders detect their prey both by visual cues and vibrations. The hunting, or curatorial, spiders are beneficial in agriculture as they seek out prey.

The goldenrod crab spider *(Misumena vatia)* is quite common in our Ottawa gardens and one I have found several times. This is a very patient spider, found on flowers while waiting to capture prey. It can change colour to blend in with the flower it is sitting on. I found one on a daisy in white and another on goldenrod in yellow. I learned it takes about six days for the spider to change from yellow to white but 10 to 25 days to change from white to yellow. When turning white, it just excretes the pigment but, when turning yellow, it needs to produce and distribute the pigment. Nature is indeed amazing to observe. A member of our Master Gardener Facebook page posted a picture of a goldenrod crab spider with a captured Japanese beetle. The spider grabs the insect, then injects it with venom, which paralyzes it and starts to liquify the insides. No one said predation is a pretty process!

There are other beneficials such as true bugs, lacewings, dragonflies, damselflies and praying mantids. We want to see these in our gardens as well and so the bug hunt continues. Most importantly, I am trying to create a welcoming garden ecosystem for beneficial insects, in effect an insectary garden. Having the beneficials in our gardens provides both pollination and natural biocontrol. Remember, you need some of the bad to attract the good bugs, so we are not talking about complete elimination. And take the time to positively identify what insects are visiting your garden and whether you need to do anything at all as only 1% of insects are pests. Take advantage and learn, as I am, from local resources such as Wild Pollinator Partners https://wildpollinators-pollinisateurssauvages.ca and Fletcher Wildlife Garden at https://ofnc.ca. Most of all, happy bug enjoyment as you watch how your garden ecosystem is benefiting insects – in E.O. Wilson's words, "the little things that run the world."

CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM FOR BENEFICIAL INSECTS

- **Plant a diversity of flower shapes and colours to ensure continuous bloom from spring to fall and a source of pollen and nectar for beneficials.**
- **Increase native plants as well as annuals and herbs.**
- **Stay away from use of insecticides even those labelled organic.**
- **Provide safe watering spots.**
- **Provide both open soil for soil-dwelling insects and mulched or stone areas for beetles.**
- **Leave the leaves for "soft landings" — habitat for pupating insects to fall into from the trees above, instead of lawn — and overwintering insects. Delay garden cleanup activities in the spring until overwintering beneficials have emerged.**
- **In the fall, leave stalks and stems standing as possible nesting sites.**

A thatched structure offering functionality and charm. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

OHS DIRECTORS COLUMN

A series of columns on gardens and gardening by members of the OHS Board of Directors. This is an opportunity to get to know more about the people on the Board who direct the affairs of the Ottawa Horticultural Society.

Creating a Rural Garden Oasis: Our Tropical Escape

BY JOANNE LACROIX

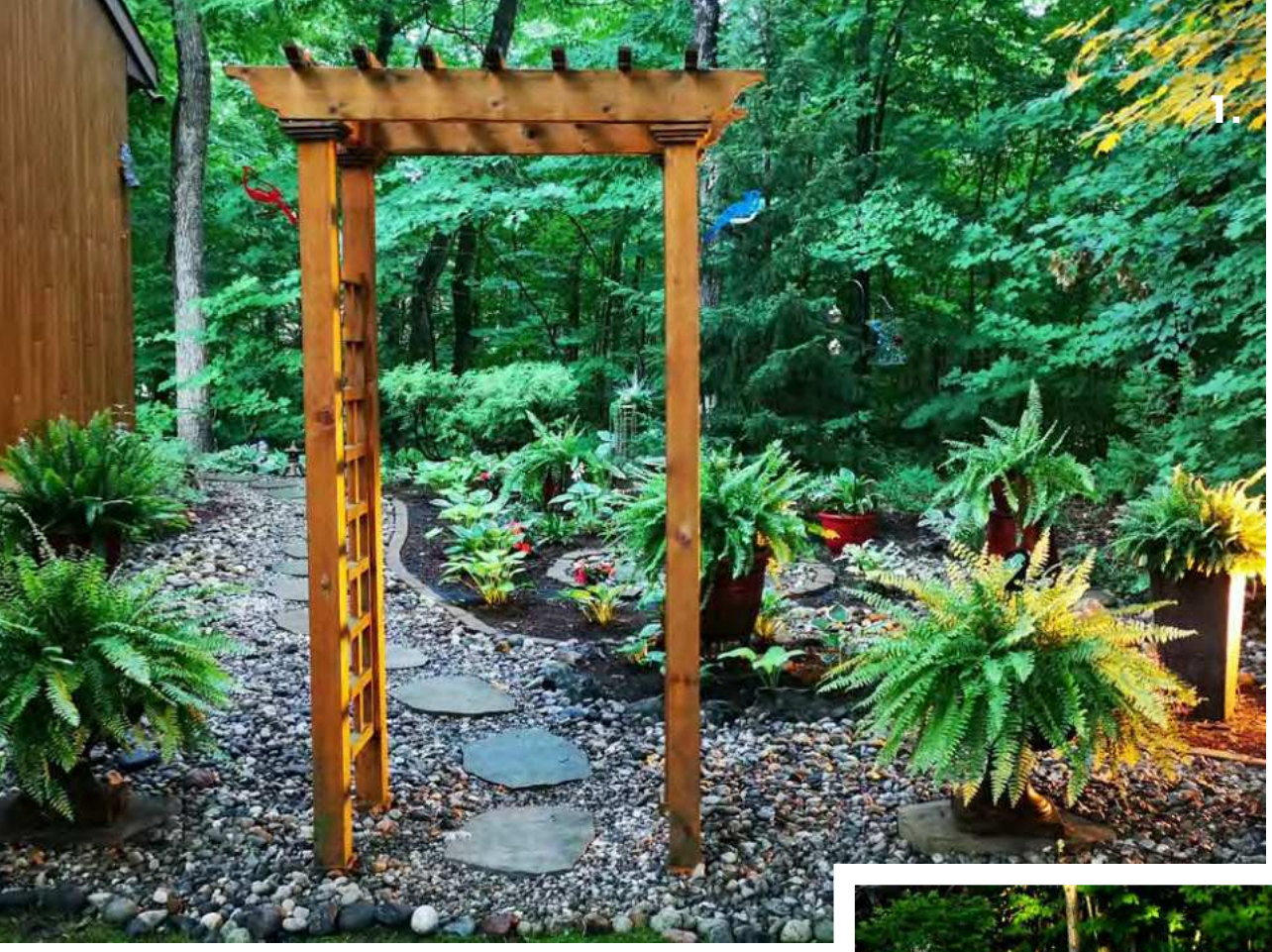
Inspired by travels to a few tropical destinations, my husband Ron and I set out to bring a slice of that paradise to our own backyard. Nestled within a largely wooded property of maple, oak, black walnut, mulberry, serviceberry, spruce, cedar and ironwood, we transformed a section of our land into an inviting retreat—a tropical oasis designed for relaxation and year-round enjoyment.

At the heart of our outdoor haven is a thatched structure, offering both functionality and charm. Ron designed the structure, and together we built it from scratch, ensuring that every detail reflected our vision. We constructed all the elements of the structure ourselves, from the stone base and framework to the finishing touches. The space features a cozy seating area centered around a fire table, a bar area for entertaining, and a BBQ /kitchen nook for outdoor culinary adventures. To enhance the experience, we incorporated pathways that weave through the gardens, connecting various pockets of greenery and leading visitors through a journey of textures and colours.

Pops of colour are added to the greenery through various potted plants such as hibiscus, and a variety of colourful annual plants suited to the light conditions on the property, including coral bells, impatiens, coleus, celosia, dipladenia and fuchsia. We are always adding new features to the gardens, ensuring that the space continues to evolve and bring new beauty each season.

Potted plants add variety and colour to the greenery. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

Gardening in our rural setting comes with its own set of challenges. Large bedrock segments limit the soil depth in many areas, and shade from the towering trees influences plant selection. We embraced these conditions, however, and



1. A shade garden was created under the large tree canopy.

2. A blanket of sedum grows naturally among the bedrock.

3. A colourful bird bath attracts many visitors

4. Baneberry (doll's eyes) are striking elements within the shade garden

Photos by Joanne Lacroix

cultivated a diverse mix of shrubs, conifers and perennials that thrive in our landscape.

Throughout the gardens, whimsical touches add a sense of charm and playfulness. Wind chimes create a soothing melody as the breeze passes through, artful stone and glass creations bring a touch of creativity to the space. The whimsical elements also bring humour to our days, often making us laugh as we discover new quirky additions tucked into the landscape.

Native varieties such as ferns, trilliums, forest grass, Solomon's seal, *Rubus*, trout lilies, wild garlic, and baneberry (doll's eyes) flourish in the shaded garden, reinforcing the natural beauty of the space. Woodland plants are plentiful and further enhance the landscape, blending seamlessly with the surrounding forest. This shaded sanctuary complements the tropical theme, providing a lush undergrowth reminiscent of exotic locales.

The garden is also a haven for wildlife, with regular visits from a variety of birds such as hummingbirds, finches, blue jays, woodpeckers, eastern bluebirds, nuthatches, chickadees and owls. These feathered friends add movement and song to the tranquil setting and their melodies serenade other visitors such as grey, black, and red squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, rabbits, deer and even the occasional fox. Wild turkeys also make frequent appearances, foraging through the undergrowth and adding to the dynamic wildlife presence. Amphibians such as tree frogs, toads, and other frogs also make their

The surrounding trees add a variety of warm autumn colours. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

home here, plus snakes, contributing to the diverse ecosystem of our garden.

Every season brings its own unique charm, from the vibrant spring blooms to the fiery hues of fall leaves and the pristine white blanket of winter. As the gardens rest for the winter, there's always the promise of the nearby spring when gardening can resume again, bringing new life and inspiration to the landscape.

Beyond the growing season, our outdoor living space continues to be a source of enjoyment. A heat lamp extends our ability to use the space into the cooler months, offering warmth and comfort on crisp evenings. Even when the weather is too cold to sit outside, the visual appeal of our oasis serves as a reminder of the warmer days ahead, fueling anticipation for the next gardening season. Our rural garden oasis is more than just a project – it is a reflection of our love for nature and outdoor living. Beyond serving as a calming retreat for us, it is also an inviting haven for local wildlife, offering shelter, food and a thriving habitat for the many creatures that share our space. By blending tropical inspiration with native adaptability, we have created a retreat that offers serenity, beauty and a deep connection to the land throughout the seasons. We are very grateful for the gifts that nature has to offer here in our rural oasis.

A chickadee in the autumn bird bath. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

Comforting oasis even during the winter season. Photo by Joanne Lacroix

THE DIBBLER

ABOUT US:
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The newsletter welcomes articles about all aspects of gardening. **A Submission and Style Guide has been prepared and is available on the OHS website: https://ottawahort.org/previous-ohs-newsletters/**

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