

Gardeners set to open their gates to visitors at annual Garden Tour



Lisa and Art Otsu have always had a passion for forests and wilderness.

These are two elements in relatively short supply in Aurora these days, but they're living their dream on Temperance Street, just beyond a fairy garden which has become something of a neighbourhood landmark.

The Otsus' garden, including Lisa's Neverland of Fairies, is just one of seven gardens set to be explored during the Annual Garden Tour hosted by the Aurora Garden & Horticultural Society (Garden Aurora) on Sunday, June 25.

Their beautiful greenspace, shaded by a giant black walnut tree and boasting themed sheds, including one dedicated to the art of Maud Lewis, brings to the table the originality of its creators, who have been cultivating the space since 1988.

"It was a perfect canvas for everything we wanted," says Lisa. "At first, it was more precision planting, then we just thought, what do we really love? The truth is absolute wilderness, forests, and it just gives us a nice feeling of privacy and home."

That love of wilderness was instilled in Lisa by her Glasgow, Scotland-born mother who took pride in her wildflowers and would often be found bent over in the garden because that's what she did until her dying day.

Art's inspiration, however, came from visits to estates where long winding driveways through greenery would eventually lead to a house popping up on the horizon.

"That's not happening here," he says with a laugh, "but it's something we can do in our backyard!"

In addition to beautiful flowers and plants populating the garden, the space is replete with what they describe as "found art" that has been expertly incorporated into the overall landscape. Some pieces might only be found if you go in for a closer look.

The Otsus' garden was selected by Garden Aurora for this year's tour first for its curb appeal where their fairies and lending library are eye-catching and frequented by neighbours of all ages.

Garden Aurora's Judy Ryan says theirs and the gardens of other selected participants "are all different and they're different for a reason."

"Not every garden appeals to the same person, but what our visitors are going to do is come here and see what's achievable and that's

our primary focus ? all the gardens are different, with different tastes, all done by the gardeners,? says Ryan. ?We're looking for gardeners who can inspire visitors to create their own bit of heaven, and that's what our gardens are.

?A garden that is complete front and back is probably the biggest challenge because sometimes the front yards aren't special or different while the back yard is spectacular. We often have to go on our gut instinct, but this garden is the whole package ? and the gardeners have personality!?

Garden Aurora carefully curates their featured gardens so each year offers something different. In most cases, once a garden has taken part it's not invited back for at least 10 years. This year's crop, purely by chance, is mostly in the Town's historic downtown area, a community typified by old growth trees and large lots.

?The big thing about this neighbourhood is all the black walnuts,? says Ryan. ?If you're in the gardening world or a gardener, people will say, ?I can't grow anything under a black walnut,' and the gardens in this neighbourhood are proof that you can. Having new gardens can be a big inspiration to people who are just starting out and don't have land. You can have a small piece of property and you can garden in it.?

The 2023 Garden Tour is self-guided and takes place Sunday, June 25, from 12 noon to 4.30 p.m. rain or shine. Tickets are \$15 and are available at New Roots Garden Centre, Wild Birds Unlimited ? Newmarket, Paradise Flower Boutique ? Aurora, Luda Flower Salon ? Aurora, Petal Me Sugar Florist ? Aurora, Replenish General Store, the Aurora Farmers' Market on June 17 and June 24.

Same day tickets will be available at the first garden on the tour located at 6 Bolsby Court, Aurora.

For more, visit gardenaurora.ca.

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