

Local enthusiasts visit nine local gardens showcased by Garden Aurora in its annual 'Garden Tour'



The 2024 Garden Tour, organized by the Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society, provided enthusiasts with a range of delightful visual experiences on Sunday afternoon.

The nine tour stops around Town showed how varied gardening and landscaping techniques can be in Plant Hardiness Zone 5B. At many of the gardens on display, local gardeners showcased the interweaving of perennials and vegetable gardens—many of which were presented in elevated cedar beds to diminish back strain when planting and harvesting the 'fruits of one's labor'.

One of the labors of last week for area gardeners was tidying beds from a series of windstorms and downpours. Last week's steady rains were both a curse and a blessing for local gardeners and some of the backyards on the tour were still saturated from Thursday's deluge of 2.5" of rain in an hour.

Garden #6, tended beautifully by David Cabianca and Troy Hourie of 34 Tyler Street, was under water three days before the tour as Tannery Creek overflowed its banks and inundated their backyard perennial beds. Amazingly, there wasn't much evidence by Sunday afternoon of 'Tannery Lake' other than the photo they displayed for tourists. The fast-flowing creek was once again populated by Mallards and complemented their multi-leveled landscaping, featuring a thyme garden and sun-loving, hardy perennials.

Across the street at 31 Tyler, Garden #5 host Angela Daust showed how her landscaping plans coexist with Tannery Creek on much higher ground. Native plants—blue spruce, wood poppy, columbine, hemlock—have replaced a lawn on the flood plain.

Daust discussed how they've 'removed most of their turf and how dwarf conifers and Japanese maples now set off our century home.'

Angela and I were in complete agreement—turf can be very overrated. Low maintenance, mulched gardens can cover high-maintenance lawns in order to create more natural and environmentally-friendly landscapes.

Garden #4 host Steve Taylor on 8 Bigwin Drive showed how stone can set off the tropical paradise he's created to complement the family pool. Alongside the pool are canna lilies, tall grasses, and a patch of milkweed that is part of a Monarch butterfly breeding program. The Monarch conservation program, conducted by his daughter, Shannon, resulted in the release of 300 of the orange and black beauties in 2023.

Taylor's wherewithal was not limited to the impressive stone work used to frame his pool and all the tropical foliage he tends including palms and cacti. His personally-constructed raised wooden beds revealed a cash crop of vegetables, including numerous varieties of tomatoes and lettuce, as well as an irrigation system and trellises to encourage steady watering and vertical gardening.

Garden #7 hosts Pat and Doug Garland's backyard at 47 Metcalfe is simply breathtaking?complemented by three babbling fountains that create a sense of tranquility as you descend stone walkways into the immaculately-tended lower gardens.

A 100-year-old Maple is the centerpiece?providing shade for the shrubs, but perennials in sun-drenched southern beds including some beautiful delphiniums and roses have enough solar exposure to thrive, too.

Heather and Rick Similas were charming hosts at Garden #2 of the tour in their backyard at 75 Batson Drive. Heather noted that they filled in their backyard pool eight years ago and have repurposed the area with hollyhocks, daylilies, and purple coneflowers. Rick disclosed the great deal he got at Walmart on elevated veggie planters and his cash crop was plumped up by the abundant rain last week. The blend of perennials and potted annuals gave the Similas's backyard a joyful look on a sunny weekend afternoon.

All nine residences were staffed by Garden Aurora volunteers and congenial hosts so the trip around Town was an enjoyable experience?even though a few random showers created climatic suspense for all participants.

Early ticket purchasers likely added a tenth stop to the tour at New Roots Garden Centre at 17235 Yonge Street in Newmarket where tour tickets could be presented at the nursery to receive a 30% discount on in-store purchases.

The Garden Tour is Garden Aurora's springboard event into its Third Annual Gardens of Distinction initiative.

According to Membership Director Heather McFarquhar, ?We'll be recognizing people who make Aurora a more beautiful place to live. Our teams of volunteers will be fanning out across Aurora to recognize our neighbors whose front gardens are enjoyed by one and all. Evaluation criteria include use of native plants for birds and pollinators; minimal lawn and use of alternate groundcovers; tidy and well-maintained; rocks, statuary, sculptures, and art; water features; planted boulevard; good use of colors and textures; and creativity in general.?

Garden Aurora volunteers will be awarding homeowners with Gardens of Distinction lawn signs between June 30-July 16.

McFarquhar also reminded readers about the Margaret Howard Gunn Memorial Award given to a candidate pursuing horticultural studies at an accredited university or college.

Deadline for applications for this \$500 scholarship is July 31.

For more details, go Garden Aurora's website at gardenaurora.ca.

By Jim Stewart