

Local gardeners gear up for 100th anniversary Garden Tour by putting on the personal touch



By Brock Weir

You can tell a lot about a person by the objects they surround themselves with.

Sometimes they are cherished mementos of their own past, or maybe a generational heirloom to show where their forebears have been and where their descendants are going.

Each one is personal and each one tells a story.

It is the same with gardens.

Ardent gardeners tell a little bit about themselves in the types of flowers, trees and shrubs they plant and next weekend, these stories will be amplified as the Aurora Garden Club marks its 100th anniversary with the annual Aurora Garden Tour.

Tickets for the self-guided tour of nine local gardens are on sale now at various locations in Aurora, King and Newmarket.

Boasting nine gardens, each featured garden is a brand new addition for the tour and, to mark the Garden Club's milestone anniversary, each participating gardener will be incorporating at least one 100 year old object into their landscape.

"We always look for gardens that are done by local gardeners, gardens for Aurorans by Aurorans," says Judy Ryan who co-chairs the Garden Tour with fellow gardener Hilka Parker. "We don't choose gardens that are created and maintained by professional landscape companies because those gardens aren't attainable for most of our visitors. We want to inspire our visitors to create their own beautiful landscapes and, in order to do that, inspire them when they walk into one of these gardens and say, 'I can do this.' It is not like walking into the gardens that are on some of the large estates in Toronto where there are thousands and thousands of dollars spent. There are gardens that you can do.

"The other essential thing is these gardens are growing plant material that everyone can grow here. We hope to inspire people who come to not just grow a lawn, but to grow trees, shrubs, and plants that attract pollinators, which is very big now. A lot of people who came to our recent plant sale were looking for native plants because we want to have a healthy environment. In order to do that, you need to plant trees and shrubs and not so much grass."

Founded in 1918, the Aurora Garden & Horticultural Society began a year of programming to mark their centenary earlier this spring.

On April 28, they welcomed a number of dignitaries as they hosted over 250 members from garden clubs across Ontario for their District Five Annual General Meeting.

Their popular annual plant sale, hosted by Aurora Home Hardware the next month, sold out in little more than an hour.

Following next weekend's Garden Tour, they turn their attention to their annual Plant Show, which will take place in August at the Aurora Public Library.

In the meantime, they are focused on the tour and selecting those 100 year old objects that are close to their hearts.

Ms. Ryan is mum about what each of the participating gardeners have selected as ticket holders will need to keep their eyes open and their thinking caps on in order to find them. Visitors will be encouraged to mark down what they think the object is and, at the end of the tour, a special gift basket will be awarded to the patron that has the most correct answers.

"This is an opportunity to actually meet with people who are doing the gardening work themselves and ask them questions," says

Ms. Ryan. ?The gardeners will be able to answer in person. This personal contact is always more beneficial than simply going online and googling it because you don't have that spontaneous two-way conversation. Everybody needs to get outside and everybody needs to put down their phones, talk with people and take a look at what is going on around them. I have been doing this a very long time we have not repeated any of the gardens for 10 years. I think that helps show the extent and the value that Aurorans put on gardening because we're able to find 10 different gardens every year.?

The Aurora Garden & Horticultural Society's Annual Tour of Gardens will take place Sunday, June 24 with a self-guided tour from 12 noon to 4.30 p.m. rain or shine. Tickets are \$15 and available at Caruso & Company (15210 Yonge Street, Aurora), Black Forest Gardens (15445 Keele Street, King), New Roots Garden Centre (17235 Yonge Street Newmarket), and they will also be sold at the Aurora Farmers' Market on Saturday, June 23 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information, visit www.gardenaaurora.ca or call 905-713-6660.