

COVER STORY

These healthy gardens are good for the environment

A garden tour shows how to plant without hurting the environment

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SPECIAL WRITER MARTY FIGLEY

A GARDEN TOUR with a healthy focus will take place 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 5, in several Detroit area communities. The clusters of gardens have been divided geographically, and each includes five or more gardens. Sponsored by Southeastern Oakland County Resource and Recovery Association, tickets can be bought on the day of the tour starting 7:45 a.m. at the SOCRRA office, 3910 W. Webster, between Coolidge and Greenfield in Royal Oak, where visitors can tour the native woodland and compost SOCRRA gardens. Tickets are \$3 for each cluster. You may choose the ones you wish to visit. Call (810) 258-5150 for information.

Several gardens in the North area are included. The gardens of Betty Sturley of Beverly Hills is an artist's garden set out in painterly fashion and filled with hundreds of growing plants. She has designed the garden using this ability with color, texture and height, which give structure. Flowers have also been chosen for fragrance all season.

One of her paintings was chosen to hang in the Arts and Flowers Show at the Detroit Institute of Arts this spring, which puts her in a niche that many aspiring artists never achieve.

Artistic garden

As you approach the home, you'll know a gardener lives there because of the myriad array of plants. A white wooden arched gate opens to the side garden. Fairy pink cluster roses stand guard at each side, while single red Dortmund roses with a hollyhock-type leaf climb overhead.

Ten square foot gardens bordered by treated lumber are stuffed with flowers, vegetables and herbs. You'll find many tall delphiniums, such as Pacific Giants and others in shades of blue, lilac, columbines, foxglove, poppies, campanulas and "always annual sweet peas." Many salvia of glorious colors "bloom their heads off all summer," Sturley said. A rosemary standard winters in the attached greenhouse and summers with basil, thyme, lavender and other herbs in the garden. At one side red raspberries provide a luscious treat. "You can't do without them."

The back yard contains beds that are packed with flowers. Sturley saves seeds of many plants and they are repeated in various gardens. Larkspur, which she loves, many lilies that she has collected for years, tree peonies, daisies, iris and roses such as "Jeanne La Jolie," a robust grower with pink clusters, fill the spaces. Most of the roses grown are repeat bloomers that continue the color throughout the season. You'll see many David Austin roses and other kinds of roses in a bed especially devoted to this flower.

To keep the roses in peak condition, Sturley sprays them every 10 to 14 days with Orthene to control insects and fungal diseases. Kelthane for spider mites.

"You cannot grow roses without spraying," she said, so she does follow a regimen.

Tall phlox came from her grandmother's garden, which she separates to open them up to central midday.

Another phlox (Sturley's) is a ground cover. The bergamot is "cut down when it gets ranky."

Variety
Unusual plants grace the gardens and all of them are sited to perform well in a particular situation. A moist area with high shade contains turtle head (Chelone), monkshood, toad lily (Tricyrtis), corydalis, monkey plant, Lewisia, nemophila and mallow. "Buffalo Rose," which covers the forget-me-not as it dies. This is one of several microclimates used to perfection.

Another contains ferns and hostas. Four small ponds terrace from the back porch to a woods and are visually connected with colorful paintings. Primulas, St. John's wort, sedums and other suitable plants abound while water lilies bloom on the ponds. A deck abuts the lower pond and provides a restful spot. Dragonflies and hummingbirds are frequent visitors.

Orchids live in the attached greenhouse along with some of the plants that she brings in from the garden for the winter.

Sturley waters the gardens only when it is absolutely necessary. A well-composted rich mature mulch was dug at least one foot deep into the clay soil for the rose bed and the other beds were covered with lots of compost from the enormous compost pile. Everything from the garden, vegetable and fruit peelings keep it "rocking." Petrell product (a natural product that has many formulas and is suitable for any soil situation) is applied in late spring and fall. Leaves from the many trees control weeds, hold in moisture and add nutrients.

Creative gardens

A healthy garden demonstrates environmentally sound practices and this tour showcases the fact that beautiful, creative gardens can be the result.

Three Birmingham gardens are included in the North cluster of the tour. One, 100 percent organic, is on the National Wildlife Federation's registry and contains a large pond; another contains lawn paths that wind through the plantings (many ideas here), while another features many planters and sculptures with the plants leaving little room for grass.

Three Troy gardens round out the tour. In the first you'll find companion planting that demonstrates integrated pest management; while yellow and orange, blue and purple, and red and blue annuals and perennials grow in sandy soil that has been amended with compost and mulch. The owners raise butterflies and provide special food for them. A backyard wildlife features plants that will entice wildlife to suburban properties. Native and non-native species grow here.

Other geographical clusters are: South area (Royal Oak, Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge), St. Clair Shores (hosted by the Yardeners), Northwest Detroit (North Rosedale Park, Rosedale Park, Grandmont) and Southwest Detroit (Corktown area).

The tour is funded through a grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture under the Groundwater and Freshwater Protection Act and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Proceeds benefit the SOCRRA Native Woodland Garden.



Artistic setting: Betty Sturley of Beverly Hills has an artistic garden featuring structures built by her husband.