

## How do their gardens grow? Join the tour and find out

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SPECIAL WRITER

**U**nexpected treasures and small elices of paradise packed with breathtaking scenery lie in front of, alongside and behind houses on three area garden walks.

East on Seven Mile Road and south of Inkster Road, there's a home on Indian Street that will be displayed during the Redford Garden Walk that will absolutely stun participants.

### Redford's best

The home's 1.75 acres includes sloping hills overlooking a bubbling creek, raised beds, shade gardens, full-sun beds, a vegetable and herb garden, berry trees and a splash of perennial flowers. The hostess and ferns are stunning.

The owners' bat house on a tall tree near the creek attracts the nocturnal mammals. On the other end of the yard, near the house, two pet bunnies sit in a pened-in area.

The modest neighborhood belies a hidden glorious retreat that includes a patio with a wooden awning overlooking water in a cozy setting that

could rival most resort getaways.

In fact, the owners of the home, Kathy LeClaire and Christina Gassner, gave up numerous camping trips to stay in their own backyard. Why go anywhere when you can open your back door and see all of nature's glory unfold including wildlife and lush greenery?

Their home is one of eight on display in the garden walk, sponsored by the Redford Township Beautification Committee.

### Livonia's beauty

In Livonia, a hedge of fairy pink rose bushes gives passers-by a hint of the majesty that lies ahead at a home on Myrna, north of Five Mile Road, east of Hubbard.

The front yard presents a rainbow of flower beds carefully planted for more than three decades by Zenobius and Okana Stelmach. A row of lively pink honeysuckle and white hydrangea welcomes visitors.

When a breeze rustles branches, the aroma from lily-of-the-valley and a multitude of flowering trees is overwhelming. Along the front of the property, Stelmach points to the mound of perennials he so carefully tends.

A special botanical project is hidden among the white cress, pink and white bleeding heart, snow on the mountain, irises, silver dollars, peonies and an assortment of ferns and hostas.

Stelmach grafted rose branches from the fairy bushes and carefully covered each to protect their roots. Some will take, others won't.

His covetousness is fertile with the attributes of what nature does to the garden caretaker.

"After a day's work, a relaxation for me was to transplant something. I just enjoyed it," said Stelmach, who is retired from his job as a professor at Highland Park Community College where he taught chemistry and biology.

On 1.25 acres of land, Stelmach has planted hundreds of trees including a multitude of spruces and pines. White and varying shades of purple lilac bushes decorate the back yard among forsythia, aster, lamb's ear and berries.

Okana makes jellies from the berries and Stelmach uses them on his bread every morning.

When the Stelmachs bought the house in 1962, there were just eight apple trees on the lot. Four of the eight are still thriving. A pigeon coop, with mostly rollers and one "homer" bird, lies above a two-story shed tucked in the back of the property.

Stelmach's home will be among seven gardens on display during the Livonia garden walk.

### Planted in Plymouth

In Plymouth, it's only fitting that Ann Warren should have an English garden, as she was born and raised in England.

Living in the United States for 32 years, Warren has managed to make room for hundreds of old perennial favorites, such as large flowering peonies, wisteria, iris, regular and miniature roses and scores of day lilies showing their blooms among wavy borders.

She has lived in her Plymouth home for 22 years, but she started her garden just 12 years ago. The tall delphiniums are her favorite.

"Some years they're really good, and some years they're not, and we just wait to see what comes up."

If Mother Nature cooperates — and she usually does — Warren has something flowering from late winter into late fall.

"I tend to overgrow," Warren said. "But when the bulbs die down, there's something that comes right up."

A large deck loaded with pots planted with petunias, pansies and assortment of other annuals is a focal point. But it's the decorating nuances, such as a tiny stone patio with a garden swing and the tastefully placed arbors, that make the biggest impression on visitors.

Her advice to new gardeners is to get plants from friends and family who are dividing their overgrown perennials.

"That's a cheap way to get started. I'm always giving stuff away."

Plant flowers that you know are successful, she added.

"Some things just don't do well here," Warren said. "We've got shade along the back, and it's very hard to get things to grow back there. Some things just don't make it and you have to try something else until it will."

### Greenmead benefits

All proceeds from the Livonia garden walk will go to the historic village, explained Janet Bennett, chairwoman of the Friends of the Development of Greenmead. The money will be earmarked for renovations to the Judge Blue home so that it can be used as a conference center and reception room.

The homes on the Livonia walk range in style from pristine and manicured to free-flowing and packed with flowers.

Taking pains not to reveal the locations of the homes before the walk, Bennett said: "One is on a ravine lot. She has a nice mix of perennials and annuals with interesting features, such as a patio with a long swing."

"You look down the ravine and creek and she has a little vegetable patch. It's very charming. The woman has a real knack."

Another garden is at a recently built home on a cul-de-sac south of Six Mile Road and east of Middlebelt.

"The lady in the home is a master gardener and she loves to talk about her plants," Bennett said. "She's bubbling over with enthusiasm, and I'm sure everyone will love talking to her and getting their garden questions answered."

Another couple was recommended by their neighbors to be on the walk.

"The lady of the home has pots hanging from the fence all over the yard. The interesting thing here is that interspersed in the beds she has figurines and carousel characters many of which she painted herself."

In Redford, some the yards will take more time than others to walk through, said garden walk chairwoman Janet Watson.

Watson's garden will be on the walk and features a waterfall pond with fantail fish that has earned her the nickname "Grandma Fishy."

The pond is home to frogs, tadpoles, water lilies and other plants to keep the water oxygenated.

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STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HAWLEY

**Garden beauty:** Zenobius Stelmach of Livonia sits near a garden in front of his home. The front yard showcases colorful flower beds that have been carefully planted for more than three decades.

### Garden walks

■ Redford — 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, June 16. Tickets \$4 in advance, \$5 day of walk, available at Redford Township Hall, 15145 Beech Dale (south of Five Mile Road); the Redford Community Center, 122121 Hemingway; Seven Mile Garden Center, 23346 West Seven Mile Road, and the Flower Station, 25801 Plymouth. For information, call Janet Watson, (313) 255-5293.

■ Livonia — 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, June 23. Tickets \$9 in advance, \$10 day of walk, available at Greenmead, 20501 Newburg (south of Eight Mile Road); Livonia public libraries, and the Department of Community Resources, 5th floor of Livonia City Hall, 33000 Civic Center Dr. (south of Five Mile and Farmington roads). Proceeds benefit Friends for the Development of Greenmead.

■ Plymouth — "Flowers are Forever" Garden Walk, sponsored by the Trailwood Garden Club, noon to 8 p.m., Tuesday, June 26, rain or shine. Tickets \$5 in advance, \$7 day of walk, available at Saxton's Garden Center, 587 W. Ann Arbor Trail; Backyard Birds, 627 S. Main; Plymouth Community Arts Council, 774 N. Sheldon, and from Georgia Randall, president of the Trailwood Garden Club, call (734) 459-7146. No strollers, please.

■ Canton — "Petals and Paths," 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, July 14. Tickets \$8 in advance, \$7 day of walk, available after June 14, from Keller and Stein, 42158 Michigan Ave., Greyses' Greenhouse, 882 Ullery; Vanessa's Flowers, 545 W. Ann Arbor Road, Mary's Farm Market, 47453 Ford Road. For information, call Judy Bloomquist, (734) 455-8283. No strollers, please.

■ Garden City — Walk hosted by the Garden City Garden Club, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, July 21. Tickets available after June 5 for \$8 from Garden City Hall, 6000 Middlebelt; Rocky's Flower & Gift Shop, 32917 Ford Road, and Barton's Greenhouse, 6414 Merriman, Westland.



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HAWLEY

**Awesome:** A hidden retreat awaits visitors to the Redford home of Kathy LeClaire and Christina Gassner. The 1.75 acre setting includes sloping hills that overlook a creek, raised beds, shade gardens, full-sun beds, a vegetable and herb garden, berry trees and a splash of perennial flowers.



PHOTO BY PAUL HUCKENBACH



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**Blooming yard:** Ann Warren's yard will be in full bloom for Plymouth's annual garden walk. There are hundreds of perennials in her English garden including peonies, wisteria, iris and miniature roses. Tall delphiniums are her favorite.



### MARTY FIQUEL

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