

Beyond the Garden Gate

Photos by Mike Davis



Many horticultural societies and clubs in communities along the Niagara Escarpment host garden tours. Check around your own community this summer to see if any are offered. Then get out and see how hard-working and creative your townfolk can be. Here are only some of the gardens that were on last year's tours in Georgetown and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Garden tours may appeal mostly to other gardeners who get ideas, confirmation of their own personal style preferences, sometimes plant divisions, news about surprising plants that can grow well in their areas, but mostly inspiration to keep improving their own gardens. Yet these tours also appeal to people who appreciate the art of creating beauty with nature, as well as the simply curious who love to see what's going on in back yards or beyond garden gates.

[Photo this page] Horticultural tours like Georgetown's invite the curious to enter the garden, descend the stairs and follow the path around to hidden private living spaces. These homeowners, faced with a long steep slope beside their house, saw a waterfall bordering the steps. What was their greatest design challenge has become their favourite garden feature.



Neighbour's benefit: not even on the garden tour, this beauty of a shabby-chic vignette is the view over the fence of one Niagara-on-the-Lake back yard. A lattice with chipped paint supports roses framing a back shed's window. Bleeding hearts and violets edging the stone walkway bring spring glory to a utilitarian space. Tiny pockets of soil can produce gardens anywhere.



While parts of this large garden in Niagara-on-the-Lake are less than a year old, there are also trees that are a century old. When "the bones" of your property are this elegant, great effects can be achieved with confident simplicity. On the front lawn, a teak table and chairs for 10 reside beneath a working electrical chandelier curtained by a 100-year-old weeping beech. A good teak bench near the house invites people to step off the gauze-curtained verandah for a closer view of Lake Ontario.



A garden room with a view! Between Georgetown and Acton, a rural garden on the edge of the Niagara Escarpment offers fabulous views. On a clear day you can see the CN Tower.



In the historic part of Georgetown, a charming garden shed, waterfall and pond bring a sense of cottage living to town. Fish and frogs live here, as does a cheeky chipmunk who calmly observes visitors from the top the waterfall, left.



10 Ideas From Garden Tours

1. Find a way to make a design challenge a good garden feature.
2. Any patch of good soil can support a garden bed.
3. Make a back shed cute by adding window boxes, wall sculpture, signs and/or perennials.
4. Create interesting focal points.
5. Instead of lawns, fill areas with plants, walkways or patios.
6. If you have the space, include large beds, plantings and structures to cover a lot of ground.
7. Include structure and evergreens for winter interest.
8. Use terraced gardens and seating areas to conquer a steep slope.
9. Make the most of any lovely elements of your neighbours' properties.
10. Scented plants in raised pots near seating areas make it easy to enjoy the fragrances.

A stately house in an old part of Georgetown crowns a rise of land. Terraced gardens tame the slope while adding great interest and beauty.



This tiny gingerbread cottage in the back yard of a Niagara-on-the-Lake house is actually the pool's pump house. Having small plants in front of it keeps the view open and makes it seem larger. While the owner of this 10-year-old garden claimed he never planted a thing, his landscaper argued that he has a very good eye. The result of their disagreements is harmony.



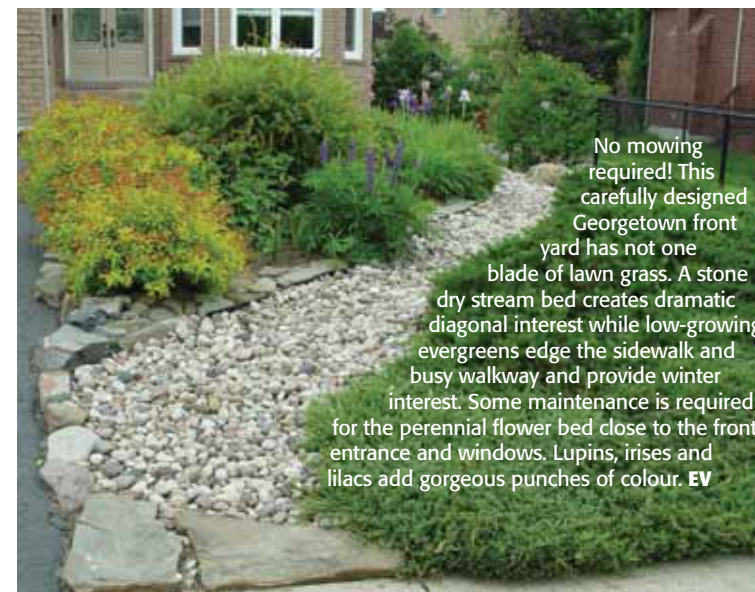
"We love to garden but don't want to be a slave to it," says the owner, and this could have been her brief to the landscape designer who created this space in Niagara-on-the-Lake about two years ago. No lawn, tall fences and structures, plenty of living and entertaining space and several all-season garden beds have transformed this back yard into a private sanctuary.



With a small town property, attention to detail pays off. This Georgetown gardener has created a pretty focal point in a corner of the front yard with vertical interest, bright annuals, rocks, mulch and perennials.



In the country outside of Georgetown, a rural garden can ramble over a large area, inviting a walk over a stream, past a rock garden, through a pergola and beyond. The only limit to a country garden is time, energy or resources, and usually all three!



No mowing required! This carefully designed Georgetown front yard has not one blade of lawn grass. A stone dry stream bed creates dramatic diagonal interest while low-growing evergreens edge the sidewalk and busy walkway and provide winter interest. Some maintenance is required for the perennial flower bed close to the front entrance and windows. Lupins, irises and lilacs add gorgeous punches of colour. **EV**