

Candide's Garden™

WELCOME!

Capping my own life of quixotic adventure, I have about ready to go a 'teaching garden' which is intended to provide gardening knowledge for Lake Como residents, schoolkids, scouts, etc., focusing on native plants and pollinators, and tended by squeaky clean environmental gardening practice. There are over a dozen different beds and surface treatments, representing different types of ecologies, gardens, plants, etc. Populating these areas are more than different 400 plant species, from shade/ornamental/fruit trees to Spring ephemerals and ground covers, totaling over 1,500 plants in all. Also dotted here and there are well-behaved non-native plants, earning their position either because they provide nectar, or they are just useful as a lovely "garnish." Memorial plants honor my favorite departed pets, ancestors, and Meg, a wonderful young woman my age. Every plant is inventoried and marked with both its common and horticultural name, and we are installing wood-burned signs which identify the different beds. Soon I hope to have pocket guides which describe the various aspects of the garden.

August 19th we'll see an Open House for the general public, and then in September a reprise for schools, 4H, and scouts. Already a certified Pollinator Habitat, Monarch Waystation, and Wildlife Sanctuary, the Garden is intended to be used: visitors can witness, participate in, or originate *Ideas, Projects, and Demonstrations*. Come see us - the Garden is located at 513 18th Avenue, Lake Como, NJ 07719.

Here are the various areas in the Garden:

Berry

This border hosts a variety of small fruit shrubs and brambles, from the usual suspects like raspberries and blueberries to outliers such as Goose-, Thimble-, and Lingon-berries. Passers-by are always encouraged to sample the crop.

Curiosity

This is a "fun" garden, designed to attract kids' curiosity and spur their imagination. Plants with catchy names, say 'Fairy Wand' or 'Hearts-a-Burstin,' or unusual blooms, think 'Button Bush' - are located here. More cogent lessons around the Garden can then spring from this attention-grabbing introduction.

Hedge

This illustrates that a hedge can change its function and aesthetic to accommodate our changing needs throughout the seasons. Under-planted bulbs herald the advent of Spring.

Herb

In addition to a host of culinary herbs, perennial edibles, such as asparagus, rhubarb, and strawberries, inhabit this bed.

Lawn

An alternative to the resource-hungry, environmentally-toxic conventional “crew-cut” turf grass lawn, yet still providing a fairly uniform carpet of green, is evidenced by the area of “No-Mow” lawn. This blend of low-growing native fescues is a way of providing a good-looking, environmentally-friendly turf. Because New Jersey is in a transition zone climate, in more parched areas we are combining the cool season fescues with warm season natives, such as Buffalo and Blue Grama Grass. A Pitcher’s Mound graces the center of the diamond-shaped lawn area, serving the needs of “Yard Ball” tournaments. A study is being conducted to verify published cost savings and environmental benefits, but perhaps more importantly, to uncover the creative landscaping opportunities enabled by removing the need to scalp.

Orchard

This border contains a dozen different kinds of fruit trees, managed by strict holistic/biological principles, for instance, depending on plant health gained from the soil and spraying for nutrition rather than insect holocaust. This is quite a challenge, given the difficulty of growing fruit trees at the Shore. Between the trees lie a variety of shrubs, companion perennials, and of course, lots of Comfrey, to mine nutrients from the deep.

Pollinator

Perennials which provide nectar and some habitat for the more than 400 species of New Jersey’s native bees are located here. The various milkweeds and a nearby birdbath allow this bed to serve as a Monarch Way Station. The logs surrounding the bed are drilled to create habitat for pollinators. A Chinese Paper Bush - *Edgeworthia papyrifera* - provides some garnish, for a bit of light relief!

Shade

Maples on the West and an American Linden on the South side of the house illustrate the benefits of deciduous trees in reducing the house’s heat load in Summer, while allowing the sun to warm the house in Winter. Shade-appropriate plantings and ground coverings under the trees provide color and keep weeds at bay. Mr. and Ms. Cardinal and their friends enjoy the feeders and birdbath. Some of my Son’s mushroomed logs are decomposing here as well.

Shore

Trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses, and ground covers which grow natively along the Mid-Atlantic shoreline can be found here. Additionally, plants which thrive in a sandy, dry environment are also allowed entry, providing Shore gardeners a wider palette. And...it’s home to the only plant which is native to all 48 contiguous United States!

Veggie

Traditional veggies are supplemented by more arcane species, such as Tomatillo and Pak Choy, all grown holistically and rotated according to a simplified system suitable for local homeowners.

Verge

Given public ownership but homeowners’ responsibility for upkeep, the space between the sidewalk and the curb (the ‘Verge’ for short) is fertile battleground between public and private interests - how do you say, “Tripping Hazard?” Each of ten Verge segments is planted with a different ground cover to

illustrate the many alternatives to turf grass while staying under the Borough ordinance's 10-inch height limit.

Vertical

Two wooden constructions illustrate the potential for gardening in the vertical plane – one stationary, the other mobile. All sorts of plants grace these Vertical Gardens. A plexiglass front on one invites kids to view the variety and wonder of root development.

Weedy

One year in the Veggie Bed a vigorous weed got a head start, quickly reaching three feet in height! Just as it came to its reckoning, it was noticed that the blooms were absolutely swarmed(sic) by native bees and other pollinators. Realizing what was wrong with this picture, this knapweed was transplanted rather than executed. Thus the Weedy bed got its start. It is now being populated by all sorts of volunteers, the only entrance criterion being an environmental benefit (and minimal or controlled invasiveness). The other quirky benefit is that it actually resembles a conventional garden!

Woodland

An attempt to simulate rather than replicate the woodland environment drives this rather deep border. Ground covers and Spring ephemerals are interspersed with woodland perennials, which in turn are surmounted by understory shrubs and small trees. Over-arching these forest levels of course are the large trees, some familiar, others not so. A collection of Mountain Laurels ranges from the straight species to the rare Willow-Leaf variety. A red brick path offers the kids a 360-degree view, passing by the log and branch hedgerow which offers a welcome home for little critters. Much like the real woods, this Woodland manifestation comes very close to being self-perpetuating, requiring little human intervention.

TENDING THE GARDEN

Covering Ground

The Garden is committed to having no impervious surfaces and minimizing environmental impact. So a variety of ways of covering ground introduce alternatives to environmentally harmful hard surfaces – think concrete - and of course, turf grass. These alternative surfaces include ground covers, pervious(!) concrete and pavers, and creative mulching. The “No-Mow” grass provides infill for the lawn grid producing an almost invisible pervious surface for the driveway, saving our storm drains and the Lake. Quick-growing wildflowers are sown in beds, to discourage weeds while the plants are filling in the gaps. Excepting the house and the sidewalk, the site is 85% pervious, setting a maximum goal for others.

Street Trees

Contention with Overhead Lines – A systematic approach is being undertaken to develop an alternative to the tendency for the utilities companies to fashion unsightly and likely unsafe ‘wishbone’ tree shapes. The aim is to create a more shapely configuration of the reduced canopy, yet still preserve structural integrity. A variety of pruning techniques are being tried on the seven street trees in the Verge along the side of the Garden. Example techniques are pollarding and crown reduction.

Bradford Pears - The street trees in question happen to be Callery (Bradford-type) pears, planted before we knew of their dark reputation. So a by-product of the project is to test each pruning technique's ability to reduce these trees' proclivity to become invasive and then to lose major limbs in later years. Different native vines growing up the trees are helping to civilize this surgical street scene.

Main Street Arboretum – The Environmental Commission is contributing to Lake Como's Main Street Revitalization initiative by planning to install right-sized, diverse, native, wildlife and pollinator-friendly street trees. We will also be starting a tree-planting program for the main raceways from the Parkway to the beach. Seven right-sized, native trees in the Verge along the front of the Garden are serving to pilot these projects.

Water Management

Rainwater collected in rain barrels at the four corners of the house is distributed to nearby borders. We plan to experiment with different storage systems for coping with the variations in rainfall. In a separate system, a Byzantine network of soaker hoses distributes mains water to needy internal beds.

Earth-friendly Maintenance

There is no Fall Cleanup in this Garden; we value the need to preserve wildlife and pollinator habitat over the Winter. Yard cleanup happens at the last minute in Spring, ie., right after the bees emerge from their nests. Just about all plant material that is gathered stays in the Garden: tree and shrub prunings are chipped and spread as mulch, seedless weeds are composted and re-invested, and fallen leaves stay where they are, or those on the open areas are vacuumed and spread as mulch. As kitchen waste is also rigorously composted, nothing organic except diseased plants or weeds in seed leaves the site.

PEEKING OVER THE FENCE

For the Environmental Commission I provide free advice to homeowners and proprietors on environmentally-friendly landscaping and gardening, featuring native wildlife, plants, and pollinators. Currently I bring advisees to the Garden so they can view the recommended plants actually growing on location. I like to think my pest and disease referrals help to promote the Master Gardeners Helpline. Longer term the Garden will be serving as an environmental model for the Borough in moving toward a more green, "Village" type of environment. Moreover, I am trying to make my little patch - the Borough - and perhaps further up and down the Shore, just a bit more congenial place to inhabit - in consonance with the natural world.

INFORMATION & VISITS

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