

Doors Open at Merlin's Hollow



By **Dierdre Tomlinson**

Don't miss your chance to visit Merlin's Hollow on Saturday, August 17 as part of the 8th annual Doors Open Aurora event.

It is the first time since 2008 the public will have an opportunity to explore this magnificent garden. Be sure to drop by between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. at 181 Centre Crescent.



The garden first opened to the public 32 years ago in 1981, after David Tomlinson, the sole builder and landscape architect, created a series of gardens within a garden from the square of grass on the property when it was purchased in 1978.

Enclosed by high cedar hedges, each garden has its own distinct character.

As you enter the winter garden in front of the house you will see handsome snake sculptures by Ron Baird. This leads into the main garden where beds are filled with perennials from twelve inches to eight feet high.

A series of arches invite visitors from one garden to the next. There is a frog pond surrounded by bog beds and extensive rock gardens holding a multiplicity of tiny alpine plants and bulbs.

A quarter-acre fragrant garden, full of many scents, has a thyme lawn and mauve and white flowers in June. Before the hedges had grown, a friendly neighbour used to look across and say, 'Ah, Adam and Eva in the Garden of Paradiso.'

This inspired the stained glass window in the gazebo.

The garden is filled with a huge range of plants, most of which were grown from seed. Until recently, 1,000 packets of seeds were sowed each year from different parts of the world from areas of China, New Zealand, the Middle East, Europe and South America.

Each year, 130 bags of leaves are placed on the garden beds, other than the sandy and rock garden areas.

The diversity of flowers in the garden attracts a number of different insects, including many species of bees and Mourning Cloak, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Tortoiseshell, Mustard White and Azure Blue butterflies.

More than 90 different species of birds have been seen in the garden, from red and white-winged cross bills, nuthatches, sharp-shinned hawks, wild turkeys and ruffed grouse.

Frogs, toads and fish breed in the pond as well. Bats fly in a lazy figure eight over the garden, hunting insects in the evening. The insects themselves have become as diverse and fascinating at the plants.

The garden is thought by some as a sanctuary for people, who enjoy and learn from what they see. It is good to see familiar faces returning to the garden year after year as well as new visitors.

The garden has attracted many photographers who take incredible photographs of plants, insects or scenes of the garden. Many of these are posted on websites, telling the world what the garden has to offer.

Come and enjoy Merlin's Hollow with family and friends. Be sure to attend the two guided tours at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Many more sites are also participating this year, including: the Aurora Rising Sun Masonic Lodge, the Benjamin Stephenson House, Trinity Anglican Church, Aurora United Church, the Aurora Armoury, the Absalom Blaker House, Wells Street Lofts and Horton Place.

For more information about Doors Open Aurora or to volunteer for the event, please visit www.aurora.ca and click on the Doors Open icon on the front page. We hope to see you there!