

Think you've seen it all on the Aurora Garden Tour? Think again!



By Brock Weir

There are few things Diane Jenner finds more therapeutic than grabbing her shears and diving into her flower beds for an hour or two of deadheading.

But does what was once a gardener's tried and true method of relaxation take on the tinge of 'work' when you're preparing to make your own oasis ready for the curious eyes of hundreds of gardeners?

Maybe for some, but not for Ms. Jenner and John Thomson.

Jenner and Thomson, both recent retirees from York University, have done all the heavy lifting for their Hill Drive garden, now they have a few days to relax before they welcome people from far and wide taking in this Sunday's Aurora Garden Tour, hosted by the Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society.

Event organizers Judy Ryan and Hilka Parker first set eyes upon the Jenner and Thomson garden last year and immediately asked them if they would consider being one of seven featured gardens on this year's tour.

At that point, however, Ms. Jenner had not yet planted an unexpected gift of eleven rosebushes which required a significant overhaul of their front garden, but the Garden Club members knew they had a sure winner.

'We tell our gardeners 'and we are really, really clear about this the previous year 'we chose your garden based on how it looks today, so please don't undertake anything strenuous or out of the ordinary to get it ready for the tour next year,' says Ms. Ryan, before adding with a laugh, 'One year and not one gardener has ever listened to what we said! In some respects, the pressure is on and in another respect it is, 'Well, we have been wanting to do this for a while now that is the shove we need.''

The couple, however, didn't need much of a nudge.

Their eclectic garden has been a labour of love since they moved to Hill Drive over 25 years ago.

At that time, Ms. Jenner describes the area as not much more than a 'desert' with some grass and an old swing set. Over time, it has evolved into lush flower beds, quiet corners of calm, punctuated with bursts of colour.

Faced with that 'desert,' the natural-born gardeners knew they had a lot of work to do, but 'work' is all relative.

'I used to live in an apartment building and we had plants on the balcony and off the rails, on the floor,' says Thomson. 'I had an allotment garden when I was out living near the university and no tradition of gardening in my family. That first year I grew lots of peas, beans and green stuff. Of course, we would trade tomatoes for chard and mess around with other people. We ended up with far more than the two of us could eat so we were giving a lot of it away.

'This garden (on Hill Drive) started because I wanted to put in a vegetable patch!'

So much for the veggies. The peas, beans and chard have given way to colourful varieties of flowers, many of which were specifically selected to flourish in the shade ' shade generated from particularly enthusiastic trees on their neighbours' properties. 'One thing we try to do is get something to bloom throughout the summer,' says Jenner. 'In the spring we always found that the garden looks great and then it sort of got very ratty towards the middle and end of summer. We tried to make sure there is always something blooming throughout the summer.'

Now, people can see for themselves.

Ms. Jenner says she and John have wanted to be on the Garden Tour for a long while. They particularly enjoy seeing how people interpret their individual styles of gardening to their own unique spaces, whether they are backing onto an industrial unit, contending with a hillside, or dealing with a generally 'quirky' shape.

'We have never seen two the same,' says Mr. Thompson.

And that, in the end, is just what the Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society strives for.

'One day at the Farmers' Market, a woman came up to us when we were selling tickets and she said, 'Oh, yeah, I have been on your tour and I have already seen the gardens.' Recalls Ms. Ryan. 'No, you haven't,' I said, 'because we try not to repeat a garden in ten years!'

This year's Annual Tour of Gardens takes place this Sunday, June 25. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased in advance at Caruso & Co. (15210 Yonge Street), King's Black Forest Garden Centre (15445 Keele Street), Aurora Home Hardware, and this Saturday at the Aurora Farmers' Market.

Tickets may also be purchased on the same day at the first garden on the tour, located at 15 Pine Needle Drive.

For more information, call 905-713-6660.