

# Washington's Hidden Garden Gems

## The Fourth Annual Shepherd Park Garden Tour

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY DEREK THOMAS

Washington in the spring is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. There is a nonstop show of hundreds of plants exploding in an orchestrated yet wildly beautiful display.

The neighborhoods of Shepherd Park, Colonial Village and North Portal Estates, with approximately 1,500 homes, are jewels to behold in any season. However, it is during the spring that these tree-filled city enclaves are at their riotous best. Perhaps it has something to do with each neighborhood's mature and diverse deciduous tree-lined streets and gardens, maybe it is their close proximity to Rock Creek Park, or could it be the large lots that many of the residents have transformed into private city garden oases? The reasons for each neighborhood's beauty aren't as important as the timing of their annual garden event. The Shepherd Park Citizens Association is in perfect harmony with Mother Nature each spring for their garden tour. The tour, now in its fourth year, will feature seven great gardens on May 18 from 1-4 p.m. and promises to be the best tour yet.

One garden has had the same owner for 40 years; another is a professional garden designer's personal garden which is a tribute to gardens in the grand English tradition; and another has been professionally installed and maintained by the homeowner. Washington Gardener Magazine sponsors the tour, and the proceeds will enable the communities to continue to beautify and enhance life in their neighborhoods.

### The Gardens

Pat Bailey, one of the tours co-chairs, offered DC North a private tour of a few gardens. The following three gardens are a hint of the beauty that will be shared with all for a few short hours on the day of the tour.

### The Bailey Houck Garden

Twenty-year veterans of the neighborhood, Pat Bailey and George Houck have a stunning colonial brick home and a great garden that is eclectic yet well thought out. The border gardens have a smooth flow; there is great variety of texture shape and color; and plants are juxtaposed in wonderfully sporadic way that creates great diversity in shape, size and texture. The trees are well placed, and the overall flow of the garden is smooth and seamless. The water feature is an antique millstone that has been placed atop a river rock bed. There is a side path that flows past the fountain and spills out to the flagstone patio and rear lawn area. While strolling through the garden, the wide variety of plants give a feeling of a fun departure to a park-like setting with plants like Carex and peonies, Solomon's seal and Nandina, sweet bay magnolia and bachelors button, coexisting in graceful harmony. The formal pathways and lawn area add a structure and purposeful flow to the gardens. Very well done.

### The McClain Garden

Wow. The home is a stone mansion, and the gardens are a tribute to the magnificent, grand English countryside gardens. Philip McClain has designed many Washington gardens, so it is only fitting that his personal gardens are the best that Washington has to offer. The front garden is a traditional English border garden with its winding front pathway, stunning trees – like the 30-foot blue China fir – and the necessary lilacs and daffodils. Follow the disappearing path to the left side of the house and around back, and you will be quickly thrown from Washington to the charm, mystique and contemplative exquisiteness of an English-inspired cottage garden. The rolling, covered pathway is a throwback to a simpler time and space. The garden beds are more waiflike clouds than anything structured or contrived, and the surrounding lawns caress and define without definition. The hundreds of plants that are represented within these beds have been allowed to volunteer their offspring's placement and help add to the flow and ebb that is present throughout. There are iconic plants like the mature well-trained lace leaf maple that is an inspiration to any one who wants to garden and the mature, graceful, grand Cryptomeria japonicas. McClain has even planted trees in his neighbor's gardens to add to the overall grace and grandeur of the rolling, graceful, English countryside garden. There is a formal lily pond and a sitting area tucked into the corner of the home where many an hour can be passed enjoying this simply fabulous secret garden retreat.

### The Mirel Garden

Larry and Betsy Mirel have lived in their home for the last 40 years. The gardens that flow up and to the left from their home in their unique, L-shaped woodland lot are simply and tastefully done. The mature 60-foot evergreens that flank the garden are worth the visit in and of themselves, but the wonders of a 40-year-old garden don't stop there. The massive woodland poppy garden, the 20-year-old bleeding heart, the 15-foot Camellia, the grand forsythias and the rose of Sharon all add to this rolling country garden. There is a statue that is juxtaposed in the calm garden with its harsh lines and sharp angles. And the garden gets its whimsy from the 6-foot-tall replica of the Washington Monument that doubles as a working wren house. The gardens have been a 40-year pastime to the homeowners who are amateur gardeners. Simple yet wonderful.

*For more information on the tour or to purchase tickets (\$15/general; \$7/members of Shepherd Park Citizens Association) go to [www.shepherdpark.org/Garden2008/info.html](http://www.shepherdpark.org/Garden2008/info.html).*

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The Mirels' Washington Monument wren house

McClain's lilypond



McClain's English-inspired garden

Bailey's garden combines texture color and contrast

