

The Garden Conservancy News

Winter 2025





Cassiopeia Farm, Austin, TX. Photo: Buff Strickland

In a Landmark Year, We Highlight the Heart of Open Days



As 2025 draws to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect with you on what has been a truly remarkable and celebratory year: the 30th anniversary of the Garden Conservancy Open Days™ program. The success of this milestone season belongs to everyone in our community, and I thank each of you for being a vital part of it.

Three decades ago, Open Days began as a simple, heartfelt idea. Conceived by our Director Emerita Page Dickey and her friend Pepe Maynard, the program launched in 1995 with just 110 gardens in New York and Connecticut. What a journey it's been! By 1997, Open Days went national, and it has steadily grown—not just in geography but in its educational depth, evolving to include complementary programs like Digging Deeper and the Garden Masters program.

The heart of Open Days has always been the passion and generosity of our volunteers. Since 1995, more than 4,500 gardens across 40 states (plus D.C. and British Columbia) have opened for the program, welcoming over 1.4 million visitors. Seeing everyone's enthusiasm this past season—our 30th—was especially moving. This collective effort, supported by thousands of dedicated Garden Hosts, Regional Ambassadors, volunteers, and our nonprofit partners, makes it possible for us all to share ideas, expertise, and a profound love for nature, art, and horticulture.

On the cover: Enchanting Rose Garden in Grosse Pointe Farms, MI, opened its gates to the public for the first time in 2025. Photo: Marvin Shaouni



Much has changed since the program began, but the essential human desire to connect, learn, and explore has not. Especially after the past few years, we know that gardening is more than a hobby—it's a critical way we make the world a more hospitable and healthier place.

This brings us to what makes a garden so special: It is a deeply creative act. No matter how much we blur the line between man-made and natural, gardens delight us because they are, ultimately, a work of art and humanity. They often tell us as

much—if not more—about the gardeners who created them as they do about the plants and trees they contain.

In the pages that follow, you will have the pleasure of reading about this special season from the people who made it happen. We have gathered the perspectives of five wonderful Garden Hosts and Open Days Ambassadors, each offering their unique, firsthand view of the program—from the joy of preparing for their Open Day to the sense of community the program fosters. I truly believe their stories capture the spirit of what we all love about Open Days.

With warm wishes for the holidays and the year ahead,

James Brayton Hall
President and CEO, The Garden Conservancy



The Garden Conservancy

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The Mission of the Garden Conservancy is to preserve, share, and celebrate America's gardens and diverse gardening traditions for the education and inspiration of the public.

The Garden Conservancy

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Celebrating Gardens Across Generations



As we close the chapter on a landmark year, it is impossible not to feel inspired by the extraordinary momentum behind the Garden Conservancy's Open Days™ program. Celebrating our 30th anniversary with the largest season in almost a decade, we witnessed firsthand how gardens continue to unite communities, spark innovation, and deepen our connection to nature.

America's relationship to nature has transformed over the past three decades. Concerns for conservation in the 1990s have evolved in the age of climate change, and gardening has assumed a new urgency as many of us seek to foster an authentic connection to nature and play a personal role in combatting the worst of the biodiversity crisis.

Recent developments in the Open Days program have confirmed its cultural vitality for a new generation. A prime example: In 2022, we launched Nibbled Leaf, our very own nature-friendly gardening initiative, developed in partnership with the Perfect Earth Project. This year, I am delighted to report that over two-thirds of our gardens featured the Nibbled Leaf icon in the Open Days directory, signifying that these gardens are maintained with all living creatures in mind. If you visited one, you saw firsthand just how beautiful and beneficial nature-friendly practices are.

In all this year, we offered nearly 350 visiting opportunities across 22 states. This included the addition of exciting new regions like New Mexico and expanded offerings in Texas. Another highlight was our spectacular return to Michigan with the Detroit Garden Weekend in June. The three-day series included a guided exploration of the Oudolf Garden Detroit on historic Belle Isle, a Garden Masters event at Frank Lloyd Wright's Turkel House showcasing the harmony between architecture and landscape, and five inspiring Open Days garden visits across the area.

Our return to Detroit neatly exemplifies our core mission: bringing people together to explore design, ecology, and community—all more urgent than ever in the history of the Open Days program. This anniversary is more than a reflection of our past—it is a springboard into an exciting future, as we look ahead to 2026 with renewed purpose and possibility.

Whether you are a seasoned gardener or newly inspired, your participation fuels a movement that celebrates beauty, nature, and belonging. As we move toward the new year, remember that the more we get out there and visit new gardens and interact with other gardeners, the more likely it is our own gardens will evolve in positive and beautiful ways.

Thank you again for an unforgettable 30th anniversary season.

Sincerely,

H. Horatio Joyce, PhD
Director of Public Programs and Education

Left: Reimagining and Redefining the Urban Garden, a 2022 Garden Masters event at Garden by the Bay, Far Rockaway, NY. Photo: Michael Vahrenwald

Three Decades of Garden Magic

1995

After Page Dickey and Pepe Maynard approach Frank Cabot about beginning a garden visitation program, Open Days is launched, featuring 110 gardens in New York and Connecticut

The first edition of the Open Days Directory is printed
Open Days Regional Ambassadors meet for the first time in Cold Spring, NY

1997

The Open Days program expands nationwide with Open Days in the Midwest, Pacific Coast, and the South

1998

Janet Meakin Poor becomes first chair of Open Days and leads a national expansion of the program
A meeting of Open Days Regional Ambassadors is held in Birmingham, AL

2000

The Open Days schedule goes online with the launch of the Garden Conservancy website

2004

Sleepy Cat Farm in Greenwich, CT, hosts its first Open Day (it was called Clapboard Ridge Garden at the time)

2005

James deGrey David becomes second national chair of Open Days

2006

Hicks Garden in Austin, TX, attracts 2,452 visitors in just one day

2007

Open Days Regional Ambassadors meet in Austin, TX

2008

The Open Days Directory becomes complimentary to Garden Conservancy members

2009

“Limestone & Water” symposium at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center held with Open Day in Austin, TX

The first Open Day for Bird Haven Farm in Hunterdon County, NJ



Clockwise from the top left: Pepe Maynard and Page Dickey; Louise Wrinkle and Janet Meakin Poor; 2000 Open Day in Tenafly, NJ; Open Day at Sleepy Cat in Greenwich, CT; 2006 Open Day in Austin, TX; InSitu, in Redding, CT, a garden that first opened its gates in 2009; 2003 Open Days in Pasadena, CA; the inaugural Open Days Directory.



Clockwise from top left: 2013 Open Day at Barlow Mountain Garden, Ridgefield, CT; 2015 Digging Deeper at Jardin de Buis, Hunterdon County, NJ; 2024 Palm Springs, CA, Open Day; 2024 Birmingham Garden Weekend at Louise Wrinkle's Southern Woodland Garden in Mountain Brook, AL; 2023 Digging Deeper program at Julie Newmar's Garden in Los Angeles, CA; a pandemic-era virtual program.

2013

Our first Open Days are held in Charleston, SC, in partnership with the Charleston Horticultural Society

2014

An advisory committee of key participants meets in Cold Spring, NY, to envision the future of Open Days

2015

The Garden Conservancy is awarded the Wilfred J. Jung Distinguished Service Medal by the Garden Writers Association (now Garden Communications International) for the Open Days program

The Digging Deeper guided lecture series launches to supplement Open Days self-guided garden visits

2016

The printed Open Days Directory returns by popular demand after a one-year hiatus

2017

James Brayton Hall becomes the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Garden Conservancy

2020

The Garden Conservancy Board of Directors forms an Open Days Committee

Originally launched as an essential lifeline to keep gardeners connected during the COVID pandemic, the Garden Conservancy's Virtual Programs have since blossomed into a popular, permanent cornerstone of our educational programming

2021

The Open Days Directory is not printed due to the pandemic, but is available online

Electronic ticketing for Open Days is rolled out

2022

The Open Days Directory returns in print

2023

Open Days attendance returns to pre-pandemic levels

2024

Five gardens in Palm Springs, CA, open on March 2, our earliest start to the Open Days season

Open Days returns to Alabama, coinciding with the film documentary premiere of *A Garden in Conversation: Louise Agee Wrinkle's Southern Woodland Sanctuary* in Birmingham

2025

Three Santa Fe gardens open for our first ever Open Days in New Mexico



The Ambassador: Spreading the Joy of Southern California's Gardens

The Open Days program thrives thanks to the many people who nurture it season after season—plant collectors eager to explore new gardens, hosts who open their gates, designers inspired by endless styles, and volunteers who help the program grow.

Joseph Marek has been all of these. Since first sharing his Santa Monica garden through Open Days in 2003 with his partner, John Bernatz, he has continued to lend his time, talent, and vision, inspiring many others to do the same. “It’s a joyful day,” Marek says of Open Days’ enduring appeal. “You never walk out of an Open Day in a bad mood. It’s a happy day in a garden.”

Marek and Bernatz transformed a modest bungalow and detached garage into a lush sanctuary of interconnected spaces—two courtyards in front and five distinct garden rooms behind. Though the property measures just under 8,000 square feet, its layered design feels expansive. Visitors enter through a juniper hedge to discover a bubbling fountain surrounded by aloes, agaves, and olive trees, then move to a sandstone checkerboard courtyard adorned with pots of succulents, bromeliads, and rare plants.

Behind the house, a Chinese elm shades a series of garden rooms filled with aloes, birds of paradise, begonias, tillandsias, roses, and orchids. “I have an orchid blooming every day of the year,” Marek says.

In Santa Monica’s benign climate, his roses flourish—an expression of his lifelong passion for growing and hybridizing them. Because the home garden is mostly shaded, he also tends a nearby community garden plot where he cultivates vegetables.

Marek’s love of gardening began early. At age five, living in Alaska, he planted nasturtiums and pinto beans. “My father was in the U.S. Air Force, so we moved often,”

he recalls, “but I always made a little garden wherever we lived, even if it was just on a windowsill.”

In California since 1994, Marek delights in autumn, when rains awaken the landscape. In 2018, he and Bernatz hosted a fall Digging Deeper event, *In the Pink—Autumn in a California Garden*, celebrating the vivid hues of blooming aloes in tangerine, coral, and buttery gold, and the brilliant magenta blooms of ribbon bush (*Hypoestes aristata*) that has seeded itself happily through the garden.

As Regional Ambassador for Los Angeles, Marek helped expand Open Days to embrace a broader range of gardens—from professionally designed estates to intimate, entirely homemade creations. Each, he believes, offers its own inspiration and beauty.

“Open Days are not only joyful experiences,” Marek says, “they’re also a way of appreciating our cultural heritage. Just as museums celebrate art, music, and architecture, Open Days celebrate gardens in all their variety and wonder.”

Marek sees this as central to the Garden Conservancy’s mission of preserving gardens as national treasures. The Conservancy’s first project—the preservation of Ruth Bancroft’s pioneering California garden of succulents and cacti—remains a model. “It was something we hadn’t seen before,” Marek notes, “a garden born from one woman’s passion that became a celebrated destination, a botanical garden that hosts tens of thousands of visitors a year.”

Today, as a Garden Conservancy board member and chair of its Open Days Committee, Marek looks ahead to a new generation of garden lovers. He imagines a 28-year-old whose apartment overflows with houseplants and hopes that, one day, that enthusiasm will blossom outdoors—into a garden to share, and a future rooted in joy.



Photo: Isaac Hernández



Garden photos: Marion Brenner





Bird Haven Farm: Ever-Changing Beauty in a Garden Steeped in History

For **Janet Mavec**, who stewards a 25-acre landscape of wildflower meadows, heirloom orchards, historic structures, and contemporary garden designs, the first impulse to garden was a simple one: “the wonder of it all, when I was a child. As an adult, the sheer beauty.”

Mavec and her husband, Wayne Nordberg, transformed their property in Hunterdon County, NJ, from a largely untended parcel to a thriving, creative oasis called **Bird Haven Farm**. For more than 20 years, they have welcomed visitors through Garden Conservancy Open Days.

The original nineteenth-century stone house was once the home of Harriet Stratemeyer Adams, creator of

the Nancy Drew mystery stories. A garden master plan completed in 2002 by Fernando Caruncho lends visual clarity to a cluster of disparate elements, including contemporary homes, stone walls, an extensive vegetable and herb garden, and a perennial border. Guests can enjoy a woodland walk with cascading ponds, a charming pond hut, a grandchildren’s maze garden, and an overstory of mature trees.

Mavec relishes the combination of textures and colors, and the fun of seeing it all “grow, change, mutate, and change again.”

And she prizes the opportunity to share the experience through Open Days.

“A garden comes alive with people in it, enjoying it, using it,” she says. “I learn something every Open Day—about a new plant, pruning ideas, composting, whatever. Gardeners give a lot to each other.”

Her visits to other gardens, in turn, has inspired new additions at Bird Haven. The *stephanandra* hedge at Mary Ellen Hawn’s Kennelston Cottage in Far Hills, NJ, for example, inspired an extensive planting in her own garden.

One highlight from Open Days was a visit from a grandniece of Harriet Adams, who brought photos of the times she visited the property as a child every summer.

Children still enjoy the property at events like the Garden Masters program that Mavec hosted in September. Visitors young and old toured the property on a bright fall day and got to work making a delicious cider, using a blend of apples from the orchards.

Mavec’s new book, *Bird Haven Farm: The Story of an Original American Garden* (Rizzoli, 2025), with photos by Ngoc Minh Ngo, explores the story of the landscape’s evolution and the many influences throughout.

“I hope this story inspires you to try something on your own,” she writes in the Introduction, “whether that’s planting an apple tree, sowing a few lettuce seeds, or hosting friends for dinner. We all have it in us to work together with nature and create beauty, then share it.”

Going forward, she holds onto one other hope for her garden: “That beauty will reign over all the ugliness now!”

Our Open Days profiles continue on page 14.



Garden photos: Brian Jones





Plein Air Painter Nancy Friese, Garden Conservancy Artist in Residence, Finds Endless Inspiration in Gardens



Fountain and Flowers, Asters, Cat Mint and Iris Leaves by Nancy Friese, 2025
Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Cade Tompkins Projects

PRECEDING SPREAD: Detail of *Wethersfield Estate & Garden, Amenia, NY, Valley*, 2025
by Nancy Friese, Oil on canvas, 24 x 34 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Cade Tompkins Projects

On the preceding spread is a detail of painting of Wethersfield Estate & Garden by Nancy Friese, who for the past year has been the Garden Conservancy's Artist in Residence.

During the year, Friese has focused her creative talents on two historic landscapes that the Garden Conservancy is actively working to preserve and restore: Wethersfield Estate & Garden in Amenia, NY, and Blithewood Garden, in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. As the Garden Conservancy's first Artist in Residence, Friese is helping to draw attention to these efforts.

For hours at a time, the acclaimed *plein air* painter and printmaker has carefully observed the fleeting blooms, shifting light, and variety of vistas these extraordinary gardens offer. Painting with oil or watercolor, Friese translates her experiences to the canvas, adapting the work and embracing the constant change.

Gardens provide an ideal setting for her chosen work of painting out of doors, and Friese happily immerses herself. She spent a recent residency at The Mount, the historic home and garden of Gilded Age novelist Edith Wharton in Lenox, MA.

"Painting outdoors is a big endeavor," she says. "The setup, the safety, the weather all complicate the natural urge to be in nature and do art. Having the site in a protected and preserved area helps immensely."

In gardens, she says, "I can work through weather, I can take my time, I can get to know the location over hours and seasons. Spending time in one garden reveals itself in surprising ways. Each time I paint is a fresh experience."

Friese is a faculty member at Rhode Island School of Design. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University and has exhibited her work nationally and internationally. Among her honors and experiences, she received two National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artists Fellowships; a six-month Creative Artist Fellowship residency in Tokyo, and a six-month Lila Acheson Wallace Giverny Fellowship at Claude Monet's home in France. She was recently Artist in Residence at the Andy Warhol Preserve in Montauk, NY, administered by the Nature Conservancy.



Blithewood is located within the spectacular vista of the Hudson River; embedded into the hillside above the water. My first paintings were of the perimeter of the gardens, and then I moved into the garden's footprint.

This painting shows the enveloping walls and plants that focus us toward the beautiful central fountain area. Asters, catmint stalks, fall roses and iris greens, pace the walkways. The confluence of forms and details, surrounded by walled structures, is riveting. My painting's goal is to show the big world of intimate garden life.

—Nancy Friese

2025 Garden Futures Grants Recipients Revealed

The Garden Conservancy is thrilled to announce the recipients of the 2025 Garden Futures Grants! These grants are awarded to small public gardens and nonprofit organizations across the United States for general operating support and typically range from \$2,500 to \$10,000. The funding specifically recognizes groups that are fostering meaningful change in their communities through garden-based programming or advancing the preservation and study of garden history. This program allows us to celebrate and spotlight innovative and diverse gardening practices nationwide.

In 2025, we awarded \$145,000 to twenty-seven organizations across the country. Part of our Garden Futures Grants program, the Page Dickey Grant for American Gardens, is an endowed grant of \$10,000, awarded each year to a distinguished small public garden. All grant decisions were made with the assistance of our Garden Futures Grants Advisory Committee.



GARDEN FUTURES GRANTS

2025 GARDEN FUTURES GRANTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Bruce Addison
Glen Cove, NY

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- Botanic Garden at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA
- Buddha Dama Thuka Temple, Frankfort, NY
- BuggyGirl Enterprises, Chicago, IL
- Colonial Pennsylvania Farmstead, Gradyville, PA
- Cylburn Arboretum Friends, Baltimore, MD
- Denver Urban Gardens, Denver, CO
- Dumbarton Oaks Park Conservancy Inc., Washington, DC
- Elk Rock Garden Foundation, Portland, OR
- Friends of Clermont, Germantown, NY
- Friends of Mukai, Vashon, WA
- Grow Lincoln County, Newport, OR
- Growing Veterans, Lynden, WA
- Homegrown National Park, Boston, MA
- Kind Hearted Women Society (Cante Waunsilipi Wi Ta Omnicieye), Rapid City, SD
- Knoxville Botanical Garden, Knoxville, TN
- La Huerta Roots & Rays, Chicago, IL
- Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Lancaster, PA
- Maine Foodscapes, Windham, MA
- Mothers Ona Mission28, Chicago, IL
- The Healthy Earth Organization, Estero, FL
- Theodore Payne Foundation for Wild Flowers and Native Plants, Sun Valley, CA
- Wave Hill, Bronx, NY
- Wethersfield Foundation, Inc., Amenia, NY
- Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy, Austin, TX



Wave Hill, Bronx, NY. Photo: Wave Hill





SummerHome: An Engineer's Blueprint for a Resilient Urban Oasis

Lisa Negri is not your typical gardener. For two decades, she was the CEO of an environmental engineering firm, a career that cemented her reputation as a thought leader and catalyst for growth. Today, that analytical mind and passion for environmental stewardship are poured into **SummerHome**, a xeric pocket park in Denver that serves as a living laboratory for sustainable urban living. Built on a residential lot that once held an uninhabitable house, SummerHome is more than a garden—it's a powerful statement against neighborhood overdevelopment and a dedication to curbing climate change.

"Changing even one small corner of the world makes a difference," Negri asserts. She blends her engineer's approach with a deep passion for education, creating a community garden and gathering place focused on low-water, xeric, and endemic plantings. The goal is clear: to instruct and advise gardeners on how to create beauty and habitat using resilient species, providing a practical model for a drought-conscious future.

SummerHome is a compact, vibrant 1/8-acre space designed for year-round interest. The planting scheme centers around commercially available, low-water species that deliver a rolling bloom from February through October. Pathways, fountains, and art guide visitors as they explore the diverse textures and colors.

A favorite element is the large crevice garden built from Colorado buff sandstone slabs. This feature proudly highlights cold-hardy cactus and succulents from around the world—plants that thrive when others struggle. Negri has a profound appreciation for this resilience. "My favorite plants are those that struggle to survive in harsh conditions and then give all their energy to blooming just for me. In my garden, it is all the cactus and succulents," she shares.

The garden's canvas is built with trees and shrubs like 'Sucker Punch' chokecherry, redbuds, and sumacs,

setting the stage for smaller, tough plants like *Agastache*, salvias, rabbit brush, and Canyon plume. Thousands of bulbs—alliums, tulips, fritillaria—kick off the season in February, and the entire design includes open areas and solitary bee hotels to provide vital pollinator habitat.

Negri's gardening journey began in the most traditional way, in her Italian grandparents' vegetable and rose gardens. After a health-related early retirement, she rediscovered this passion as a volunteer at the Denver Botanic Gardens, eventually leading to the creation of SummerHome with mentor Kevin Philip Williams.

While the plants are spectacular, Negri stresses that the true heart of the garden is the community it fosters, such as "the little kids who run around playing in the fountains and the community of volunteers who come every month, year after year, tending this garden as if it were their own."

This drive to share and educate is what sparked her interest in the Garden Conservancy's Open Days™ program. The opportunity to draw in diverse groups of people and teach them about these tough, drought-tolerant plants is key. Open Days helps her deliver her crucial message: "These plants have to replace our lawns." The interaction with visitors, from plant killers to pros, helps her tailor her presentations and strengthen her advocacy for shifting gardening views in the face of climate change.

Looking ahead, Negri's main hope is to secure SummerHome's future. She aims to have the garden endowed and donated to an organization that can preserve it against the heavy development pressures in her neighborhood. By doing so, SummerHome can continue to inspire gardeners and solidify its legacy as an accessible, beautiful, and essential model for sustainable urban landscapes.







Sleepy Cat Farm: Designing a Dreamscape

When Fred Landman started imagining the gardens he might create around his home in Greenwich, CT, it was as if he had entered a trance.

He and noted landscape architect Charles J. Stick looked toward the wooded ridge behind his newly renovated Georgian Revival house and terrace, thinking of possibilities, and he started to sense the potential of making more than just a nice backyard.

Landman remembered the feeling he had walking through the magnificent gardens of Les Quatre Vents, the Quebec estate of Garden Conservancy Founder Frank Cabot. Traveling through the lavish series of garden rooms, Landman was stunned, feeling transported into an entirely different world.

"This is what I love about gardens," Landman remembers thinking. "They take you on a journey."

The experience inspired him to envision what he could do in Connecticut: "Let's really do it right." With Stick, Landman designed a journey modeled on Russell Page's "Golden Path" at PepsiCo's Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens in Purchase, NY. They created a granite dust

pathway that winds through an ever-changing woodland garden, offering a series of astonishingly beautiful discoveries along the way: native azaleas, fountains, statuary, a rustic stone grotto over a cascading stream, and a Japanese spirit bridge zigging and zagging through a field of irises.

Once the six-acre property was fully developed, an opportunity came up to acquire a neighboring parcel. Six acres became eight, then ten, then thirteen, opening a whole new phase of artistic and horticultural endeavors each time. Landman sought out new ideas and works of art during travels with his wife, Seen Lippert. The garden journey expanded into greater heights of beauty with a Chinese pavilion and koi pond, wisteria arbor, limonaia, vegetable garden, berry wedge, orchard, and a magnificent undulating hedge leading to a sculpture of Atlas.

Once Landman was in his trance, he never came out.

Sleepy Cat Farm is one of the marquee gardens in the Garden Conservancy Open Days program. As many as 900 people visit the property on a single day, several times a season, through Open Days. Through word of mouth, visitors learn about the garden and return to see it change throughout the seasons.

The first Open Days event was May 16, 2004, before it was known as Sleepy Cat Farm. The name honors the seventeen cats on the property, and "what they do eighteen hours a day," Landman says.

One year, "someone was walking the garden, and they just kept walking. They ended up walking to an adjacent property—they thought they were still in the garden," he says. "So then I said, 'Maybe we need a map.'"

Sleepy Cat's newest map includes a set of paw prints guiding visitors to all the

major highlights. Staff and volunteers are stationed throughout the property, answering questions. Landman mixes unobtrusively with visitors, happy to answer questions and witness their enjoyment of the garden.

When people thank him for opening the garden, he finds it puzzling: "I don't understand why I wouldn't open it."

"I've put in the effort, time, money, and resources to make this experience something I love, and it's great to find out everyone else loves it too," he says. "It's one of the nicer walks in the woods, I think. People come here to experience a garden, and yes, you're looking at a bunch of flowers, but it becomes more about discovery and the journey you get to take."

Landman's vision is still expanding, not just across the property, but into the future. Plans are being made for all of the property to transfer to the Sleepy Cat Farm Foundation, with an advisory board that will keep the garden and its spirit alive—"a garden of whimsy, and fun."

He recalls visiting a garden in Ireland that was 100 years old, yet still very much alive. "I'd like to think 100 years from now, people can come visit and have the same vibrant experience they had earlier this year," he says. "I think beautiful things are things to share."

Reflecting on the career work he's done over time, he describes having built things that emerged and then later disappeared. "I said, well, here's something I've worked on for 28-some-odd years. It's not a company. It certainly doesn't make money. But wouldn't we like to have this garden going forward, and not disappear—like gardens do."



Garden photos: Brian Jones





Oudolf Garden Detroit: Anchoring an Open Days Renaissance

The Garden Conservancy Open Days™ program is finding vibrant new roots in a city bursting with horticultural energy and community spirit: Detroit. The success of this year's Detroit Garden Weekend, anchored by the spectacular **Oudolf Garden Detroit** (OGD), is fostering a bold vision for the future of Open Days in the Midwest.

The momentum began with **Meredith Simpson**, Chief Operating Officer at the Friends of the Oudolf Garden. Her love for gardening and her hometown sparked the region's inclusion in the Open Days program. Simpson shared the immediate drive behind the effort: "Working with Oudolf Garden Detroit, we have such a fantastic community of gardeners and garden volunteers. When I met the Open Days team and saw the 2024 Directory, with nothing in Michigan, I thought, we must change this! So I worked with our team to fill out our first Open Day, and now we're off and running."

With that energy, the metro area soon had five Open Days gardens, plus a Digging Deeper event at OGD that delved into the gardening philosophy of renowned Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf, and a Garden Masters event on the interplay of architecture and landscape at the iconic Dorothy H. Turkel House, a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home in historic Palmer Woods. With the Detroit Garden Weekend proving a resounding success, Simpson says that she's determined to demonstrate that Detroit is indeed a premier garden destination.

Detroit's Open Days in June showcased the personal passion and ingenuity of the area's gardeners. Attendees were captivated by the creativity on display, which Simpson observed firsthand, and the local pride was unmistakable. "A local garden club member wrote to say she was 'beaming with pride for my hometown!' after

attending the event. I think I was beaming as well," says Simpson.

The surprise and delight from attendees confirm a long-held local secret: Detroit possesses a rich gardening legacy and a profound cultural vibrancy. Simpson notes that first-time visitors are often "surprised and delighted by the richness of Detroit—the people, culture, energy, and yes, the gardens and natural spaces all around us."

Beyond the lush plantings, Simpson points out that Detroit stands out as the only UNESCO City of Design in the United States, offering a truly immersive weekend getaway. It is, as Simpson describes it, an affordable city that truly shines.

Looking ahead, OGD is positioning itself as a world-class teaching garden and a hub for ecological horticulture. Their goal is not just to preserve the garden in perpetuity, but to share the knowledge needed to thrive, with plans to expand their endowment, bring on additional staff, and host an annual garden intern. Guests will be invited to volunteer and "dig deep into Piet's different planting styles" alongside the horticulture team.

Going forward, Simpson would like to involve public gardens, including celebrated sites like Cranbrook House & Gardens, the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, and Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor, and community-focused gems like Detroit Abloom and Circle Forest at Arboretum Detroit.

Such an expansion, she says, would elevate the profession of horticulture and recognize that the work done by gardeners is vital "to biodiversity, to our communities, and to mental health."



Garden photos: Ryan Southern



Gardens at Clock Barn, Carlisle, MA. Photo: Liz J. Moseley

Give their curiosity a place to grow!

We all know someone special who deserves a year filled with inspiration and the joy of discovering gardens. A gift membership to the Garden Conservancy cultivates their connection to nature while supporting our mission to preserve, share, and celebrate exceptional gardens and diverse gardening traditions.

Members receive invitations and special pricing for all our programs—from Open Days garden visits and Digging Deeper conversations to Garden Masters tours, in-person lectures, and virtual talks that can be enjoyed from wherever you are.

Your gift will be announced with a festive holiday card, mailed to you or directly to the recipient. In February, our beloved Open Days Directory arrives, sparking excitement for the upcoming Open Days season!

Garden Conservancy memberships start at just \$50, last a full year, and are tax-deductible. Visit gardenconservancy.org/gift-membership to give a gift that grows.

Questions? Contact us at 845.424.6500 (Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. ET) or membership@gardenconservancy.org.



The Garden Conservancy

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Make Your Year-End Donation Today!

The Garden Conservancy preserves, shares, and celebrates America's gardens and diverse gardening traditions for the education and inspiration of the public. If you would like to make an online contribution to ring out the year, please scan the QR code above to visit our donation page.