

HOME & GARDEN

A visit to the Berkshire Garden Center

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Recorder Columnist

BETWEEN THE ROWS

Visiting public gardens can be a valuable experience as well as a pleasure for a gardener. Last week I visited the Berkshire Garden Center in Stockbridge, and for \$1 I was able to tour beds of day lilies, a rose garden, large beds of perennials, a water garden and bed planted to some of the All America selections (new varieties of flowers and vegetables). And that was just on one side of the road.

I was particularly interested in the perennial borders because I got some good ideas for my own garden. Plume poppy looks nothing at all like oriental poppy, but these (2 feet) plants with their plummy nowers would make an excellent background for my new perennial garden, and they won't take as long as shrubbery to reach that magnificent height.

Another tall plant that I admired was the echinops or globe thistle. It is very spikey with handsome heads; there is a definite resemblance to the common field thistle, but the shape is clean and distinctive. The blue flower heads can be very useful in dried arrangements.

Penstemmon is a flower I have heard about but never seen. It's one thing to read the catalog description and be told that "flowers are always tubular and are borne in

profusion close to the stems," and another to see the flowers in their delicate and vibrant beauty. Prairie Fire is something I would definitely like to add to my garden, where it will bloom from June 'til frost. It will also make an excellent and long-lasting cut flower in the house.

The gardens at the center cannot be described in just one short column, and they really must be visited several times during the season to get a complete feeling for an array of flowers on display. While walking along a shaded path to the lily pond, I passed a primrose garden that must be magnificent in the spring. I never did find the wildflower trails, which must also be lovely in the spring and change considerably as the season progresses.

I did find my way to some of the exhibits on the other side of the road from the main flower gardens. I was fascinated by an exhibit of the garden tools that are valuable to enable elderly and handicapped people to continue (or begin) gardening in spite of their physical limitations. These same tools, which are often very lightweight, can also

make gardening a little easier for the rest of us.

Along with the display of tools, it was marvelous to find out that the staff of the center run a gardening program for handicapped gardeners employing raised beds so that tending their gardens is manageable for people in wheelchairs. Gardeners as young as 10 years old participate in this program.

The annual Berkshire Flower (and Garden) show is coming up and I am looking forward to returning to the center. The flower show is set up much as the flower displays are at the Franklin County Fair, so it will be an opportunity to get some ideas for entries at the fair, but it's also a chance to learn what flowers can be used to make attractive arrangements in the house. I love to stroll through my gardens and admire the flowers, but I also like to be able to bring some flowers in to brighten the dining table or my bedroom dresser. The trouble is, I am not always sure what flowers lend themselves to flower arrangements by virtue of their form and because they will last a while in water.

The flower show will run on Aug. 7 from 2 to 6 p.m. and on Aug. 8 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The charge will be \$2.

There are additional events at the garden center. On Aug. 26 at 2 p.m. there will be a

lecture on dried and fresh flower arranging, on Sept. 23 at 2 p.m. there will be a lecture with slides on home plantings to attract birds, and on Oct. 2 they will have their 48th annual Harvest Festival.

There are dozens of reasons for visiting the Berkshire Garden Center and not the least of them is the helpfulness and friendliness of the staff. They are ready to answer questions as you tour the different gardens, and while I was there chatting about the success of "bag gardens" (vegetables planted directly into plastic sacks of a soil-less planting medium and watered with fish emulsion), a woman came in asking for help in identifying three "weeds" she had brought with her, carefully wrapped in damp paper towels and a plastic baggie. In no time at all Mr. and Mrs. Bourard were rifling through all their books, and everything stopped until this woman's plants were identified and everyone had chatted about the different kinds of wildflowers, the concert at Tanglewood and the woman's friend who was waiting for her at the motel.

If you go to the Berkshire Garden Center, you can make a day of it by visiting the house and gardens at Chesterwood — which is just down the road — shopping and dining in Stockbridge (perhaps at the Red Lion Inn), visiting the Norman Rockwell Museum and ending the day with a concert under the stars at Tanglewood.

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