



Garden Tours
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Garden Tour season is upon us! These events are fund raisers for specific organizations supported by which generous people open their gardens to the public. With any luck, the weather cooperates – not too hot and no rain.

Gardens are selected for specific attributes and tours usually include a variety of styles. Some may be manicured and precise while others may be more casual. Often there is a mix of rural and urban settings. Some are large while others are tiny jewels. Not every garden will appeal to everyone's taste but all will provide opportunities to learn something new while enjoying a day visiting beautiful properties.

This may be the one time when you are invited to wander through private spaces that would not be open to the public under normal circumstances. These are in contrast to large public gardens like the Toronto Botanic Garden, which are designed and maintained by professionals. The offerings of these tours may be quite unusual but they always reflect the owner's taste and usually their hard work.

By visiting local gardens, you will see plants that flourish in your own area and you are likely to see unique solutions to specific problems. Homeowners are usually glad to share their ideas, their successes and failures,

It would be nice if the weather cooperated but most tours go rain or shine so be prepared for mother nature's quirks. Wear flat shoes, comfortable clothes, bring an umbrella if it might be necessary, and of course sun screen. You will enjoy the day much more.

Having had our garden on a few tours and volunteered as Master Gardeners in others, we have had some experience and seen some interesting behaviour.

Remember that these are private gardens. Treat them as you would like to have your property treated. A great deal of effort is made to prepare the garden for visitors. It is always nice to hear positive comments and to be thanked for the visit.

Slow down. Take time to look at all aspects of the gardens. Note the overall design. Look at the individual plants. Perhaps there are some interesting plantings or artwork. It is amusing to watch the occasional visitor race through without noticing a thing. What a waste!

Be careful where you walk. The garden is made as safe as possible but sometimes the grade or configuration makes it difficult to move around. Some damage, e.g. trodden grass or ground covers, is inevitable when you have large numbers of people walking over the same space but be respectful. Use the paths when possible and stay out of flowerbeds.

Leave your pets at home. They do not belong on a tour and certainly not in a hot car. Likewise, small children and garden tours do not usually mix but if you must bring your child remember that you are responsible for supervision. While assisting in one garden, I noticed a child walking up a stream that was part of the water feature. When I asked the mother to get the child under control, she did nothing. It would seem that she did not see that this was a problem. Besides the potential for damaging the owner's property, the child's safety was an issue. Strollers, bikes and toys also do not belong on a tour and food items should be consumed elsewhere. Certainly litter is not appreciated.

Often we wish to make a record the names of plants. One easy way to do this is to use a digital camera. Photograph the name on the tag if there is one and the plant and flowers but do not remove the tags.

You should not smoke in the gardens – you may be outside but everyone does not appreciate the lingering odour of smoke.

Picking flowers or seeds is always forbidden. If you wish to know the name of a specific flower, ask the owner to come to the plant. Do not bring a piece of the plant to the owner! Seeds should also be left in place. It is very frustrating waiting until seeds mature only to have them disappear on the day of a tour.

Park in designated areas. Usually parking is on the street so be aware of the traffic. Gardens close at specific time. Do not ask to extend this time. Bathroom facilities are not usually available at the gardens so plan ahead.

This can be a time to get together with some like-minded friends, carpooling is always a good idea. Make a day of it. Enjoy lunch together and just take the time to enjoy the fruits of someone else's labours and get some fresh ideas.

On this coming Sunday, June 14th 2009 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the annual Art Gallery Garden Tour will take you to local gardens. Tickets are available at the Art Gallery of Peterborough (705) 743-9179. They are \$10.00 per person in advance or \$12.00 per person at the garden gates.

Farther afield the Heart of Northumberland Big Sisters Big Brothers Garden Tour features eleven distinctive town and country gardens properties located in the Brighton area . It is being held on Sunday, June 28, 2009 from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Tickets are \$20.00. For more information call 905-885-8435 or Toll free: 1-888-278-2484.

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