Welcome!
Ohio State University Extension
Master Gardener Volunteers

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Learning Experience For All Ages
FRIENDSHIP
GARDENS
OF
HARDIN COUNTY
960

Shorter History
of the Friendship Gardens of Hardin County

Written by Carol McKinley

The Friendship Gardens of Hardin County were conceived by the Hardin County Masters Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) starting in 2007 in cooperation with many community groups and individual supporters. The MGVs' goal was to create interactive gardens that could be used and enjoyed by persons of all ages and abilities.

We now have over 14 different demonstration gardens for the community to visit, learn from and enjoy. From a large children's garden with plants and play areas for young people to explore, to a relaxing shade garden. Benches throughout allow visitors to rest and reflect on how plants and insects contribute to our world.

In addition to the many demonstration gardens, the MGVs offer several programs throughout the spring, summer and fall. For adults new to gardening or avid gardeners, we have an annual spring conference in March that offers 4 knowledgeable speakers, breakfast, lunch, snacks and door prizes. In the summer, we have 4 evening programs, 2 in June, one in July, and one in August featuring all kinds of garden topics. In addition to these adult programs, we have a fall children's program offered on a Saturday morning in which we make crafts, have a scavenger hunt and experience all the amazing facets of the Friendship Gardens.

A community garden like this takes a lot of dedicated volunteers to maintain. We thank all those MGVs who donate their time and expertise to weed, plant, deadhead, mulch, and keep this unique community jewel thriving for all to enjoy.

Discover the Friendship Gardens

Garden 1 - Rain Garden
You are standing in a unique location on the north/south watershed. The water in the north drains into the Blanchard River, while the water in the south drains in the Scioto River and eventually into the Gulf of Mexico by way of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The Rain Garden was constructed to introduce water into the drainage systems at the same rate that it would have prior to the construction of the Friendship Gardens and parking lot. The plants included here can stand to have wet root systems and may be submerged for a period, hopefully not to exceed 24 hours.

Garden 2 - Jackie's Place Garden
This garden was part of the inspiration for the Friendship Gardens. Jackie Castle was involved for many years at Harco Industries and would take time out of her day to come to this location for quiet time. She was tragically killed in an accident, and funds were given for a memorial. The Hardin County Board of Developmental Disabilities Superintendent, Mark Kieffer, and the staff at Harco Industries and Simon Kenton School came together with Ohio State University Extension Master Gardener Volunteers to develop a plan for a memorial garden. This space was designed to be a quiet place within the garden where individuals or groups could spend time enjoying the beauty around them. The large sandstone bench was donated by the Briar Hill Stone Company as were all the large stones in the garden.

Gardens 3 & 4 - Butterfly Garden & Pollinator Garden
Funds donated by the Hardin Northern Garden Club were used to design, install, and maintain this garden as its beginning. To help offset the decline of the Monarch butterflies' natural habitat, a Monarch Way Station was established in 2021 by following the guidelines from Monarch Watch. The Master Gardener Volunteers planted additional plants, both annuals and perennials that attract and nourish Monarchs and their larvae, as well as other pollinators.

Garden 5 - ABC Garden
This themed garden is planted with plants whose names begin with the letters A-Z. Can you find them all?

Garden 6 - Sedum Garden
This garden shows a selection of stonecrops or sedums. These durable plants will take a hot, dry location and were selected for use in a narrow strop of soil that receives a hot reflection off the west wall of the metal building. These are very care-free plants. There are also sedums in containers planted in other areas.

Discover the Friendship Gardens, continued

Garden 7 - Daylily Garden
This was one of the first gardens established in the Friendship Gardens. The daylilies were donated and planted by Rick Schmidt and Ryan Stauffer, local men involved with daylily propagation. Daylilies are rugged, adaptable, vigorous perennials that can be grown in a variety of soil. Daylilies get their name from the flower which usually bloom for one day and are replaced by new ones. Most bloom continuously for about one month.

Garden 8 - Lovena's Garden
This garden was redone in 2021 and named in memory of Lovena Trautwein, the owner of Lovena's Greenhouse. This business, on State Highway 37 between Kenton and Upper Sandusky, is family owned and operated on the lifelong family farm. Lovena, a great supporter of the Friendship Gardens, shared her knowledge of plants and donated plants to the Master Gardener Volunteers for several years. Lovena's son Jeff now runs the business and continues to support the garden. The galvanized tubs were donated by Carol McKinley from her garden. The plants, purchased with funds from Cessna Transport, include beautyberry, arborvitae, and viburnum. These donations were instrumental in the rebirth of the garden.

Garden 9 - Pondless Waterfall
This large sandstone block was recovered from the spoil pile at Briar Hill Stone Company. The Northwest Ohio Pond Society provided the funds for construction and pumping to complete this waterfall within the garden. Since there is no standing pool, it is safer for use in our public garden.

Garden 10 - Artist's Palette Garden
This is a creative garden that displays flowers as paint colors on an artist's palette with garden tools as paint brushes.

Garden 11 - Four Seasons Garden
The Four Seasons Garden was developed and planted in 2022. The focus of this area was native plants that would attract pollinators and birds. The goal of this garden is to provide color and interest through all four seasons. The variegated dogwood's red stems provide interest in the winter months and aronia has berries that are a purplish black that ripen in the fall. Robins particularly love the bright red berries of the winterberry when they return in the late winter.

Area 12 - Analemmatic Sundial
The design of this sundial was created to allow you to become involved in telling time. By walking out onto the stone within the months listed, and by choosing the correct month, your shadow should cast onto the current time of day. Don't worry! We set it up for daylight savings time as the garden is not used in the winter. You will not be an hour late.

Discover the Friendship Gardens, continued

Area 13 - Mulch Demonstration Display
Gardeners use mulch for moisture retention and weed control. There are many choices of wood mulch which can be found in many colors or in its natural state. The mulch decomposes and returns to the soil. Landscaping rocks such as granite, lava rock, river rock, quartz, and pea gravel are often used as well. Rocks are good for high traffic areas and area with drainage issues. Rock do not decompose. Some of these choices are displayed in this area.

Garden 14 - Oriental Inspired Garden
This garden is a small design intended to capture the feeling of an oriental garden. Notice the use of a stone bench, weeping dwarf evergreen, and some clumping bamboo. The ground cover is stone instead of mulch used in other areas of the gardens.

Garden 15 - Alpine Garden
The Alpine Garden was designed to show plants that will grow in a harsh environment. Many of these are native on mountains above where even trees will grow. If trees do grow there, they tend to be shrubbier in growth habit. These plants need very shallow, poor soil to thrive.

Garden 16 - Shade Garden
The Shade Garden is underneath a created shade area using a knitted shade cloth. Plants in this garden could be grown in the shade of a tall house, an overhanging tree, or other areas that do receive direct sun. You can see those plants other than ferns and hostas that can be grown in the shade. We also use a water irrigation system in this area. These drippers only place water at the base of the plant, saving water usage for other needs.

Area 17 - Shelter House
Equipped with lights, electricity, tables, and chairs, the shelter house was built as a gathering place. Events and meetings are held here and it is open to the public. Mid-Ohio Energy Cooperative, the Hardin County Community Foundation, and others helped make this possible. It is available for families and other groups to use. To reserve the shelter house, please contact Kim Thomas at 419-674-8012.

Garden 18 - Vegetable Garden
Our vegetable garden consists of four 4' X 16' raised beds and a vertical wall. These gardens are used to teach how and when to plant vegetables, as well as caring for and harvesting them. The type of vegetables grown in the raised beds is rotated yearly, and cattle panels are used to give the tomatoes support. The vertical wall, lined with small growing containers, allows for the growing of vegetables for those without in ground space or mobility issues. Produce harvested from the vegetable garden is donated to local food drives and soup kitchens.

Discover the Friendship Gardens, continued

Garden 19 - Herb Garden
The herb garden has been relocated and designed to make it easier to maintain.

Planted in large, trug pots, the herbs are easy to reach and snip. A circle of thyme is located near the Children's Garden. The Herb Society is caring for this area.

Garden 20 - Carol's Garden
Dedicated to the memory of one of our own Master Gardener Volunteers, Carol Stephan, this garden was created in 2022 to be an oasis of tranquility. A bench welcomes visitors to sit and rest or to watch their children as they play in the Children's Garden. This garden was not only designed for beauty, but also to have continuous bloom and color as well as showcase new varieties of plants and require low maintenance.

Plants include hibiscus, nepeta, arborvitae, juniper, and sedum.

Garden 20 - Saint's Garden
The Saint's Garden illustrates a formal garden design and is dedicated to Father Fiacre, Saint of Gardens. A bench invites visitors to relax and enjoy the peacefulness and beauty of the garden or to watch their children playing in the Children's Garden.

Planted in 2022, this area features boxwood arranged in a circle around a redbud tree in the center. The four corners are highlighted by white hydrangeas framing the circle.

Garden 22 - Children's Garden
Work began in 2018 when ground was cleared to add space to the Friendship Garden for a Children's Garden. In the beginning, work focused on installing permanent structures such as an in-ground tic-tac-toe board and a pretend bridge with plans to add sensory and cognitive activities in the following years. The Covid-19 pandemic initially shut down these plans, but in 2021, exploratory activities were installed. Small, 5" X 5" ring bound books were created to encourage exploration in the Friendship Gardens. A yellow brick path has been added to access the bridge and morning glories have been planted to cascade over the bridge in midsummer. Easily seen in the area are trumpet vine trees, and hanging gourds. New in 2025, a Nose Zone was created and planted in this space. Discover plants that give off fumes of pineapple, lavender, vanilla, and lemon in this sweet smelling section.

Interested in joining Ohio State University Extension's Master Gardener Volunteers Program in Hardin County?

Call, e-mail, or stop in to speak to:

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