

# Gardens of Grey Bruce a tribute to rural beauty

**Tour many private paradises that are open to the public**

**Rugged terrain often demands feats of ingenuity**

LORRAINE HUNTER  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

With caves, lighthouses and wonderful walking trails, Ontario's Grey Bruce counties offer more than cottages, fishing and sailing.

There are also many fabulous private gardens, almost 40 of which are open to the public all summer long.

Gardeners in Grey and Bruce Counties have put together a website ([www.ruralgardens.ca](http://www.ruralgardens.ca)) to help visitors plan their garden tours. Some 37 gardens are open from May to October. There are maps, individual garden websites and descriptions on the site.

It would take the summer to see them all. In fact, you probably can't really do justice to more than two or three in a single day because of the distances between them.

Speaking with the owners can provide a wealth of information on unique techniques for gardening on rocky land and some of the plants that do well in the region.

The gardens are many and varied. Some offer additional facilities such as hiking trails. Several have plants for sale, others, organically grown produce. There are also lots of bed and breakfast and resort accommodations in the area.

**Rural Roots Nature Reserve & Gardens** ([www.gardenspirit.ca](http://www.gardenspirit.ca)), at the corner of County Rd. 13 and Northacres Rd., Wiarton, for example, offers interpretive walks through crevice caves, over boardwalks, past beaver ponds and through deep woods and workshops on making your own cedar obelisk or arbour (each for an additional cost).

The property, set at the base of the Bruce Peninsula, is surrounded by quarries that extract the famous Wiarton stone, popular with gardeners and landscape architects.

Gardening here is not easy. "There is no soil," explains owner Tom Ashman.

"In order to garden at all we brought in beach sand and manure as a base and augmented it with chemically-uncontaminated soil from one of the quarries. After 30 years of sound composting and soil manage-

ment, we now have a friable, sandy loam to work with."

Due to the rugged nature of the terrain, Ashman and his wife Dee settled on container gardening. "Most of the containers we use are recycled truck and tractor tires," said Ashman. "Once surrounded by rocks and overflowing with plants they soon disappear to the eye."

There are a number of reused *objets d'art* in this garden, such as a cleverly disguised bathtub that creates a small haven for frogs. An arbour of ladders is covered in Niagara white grapes. Vegetables and heritage perennials are grown in outdoor raised beds where they receive no winter protection and are thus extremely hardy.

Bill and Dawn Loney, owners of **Keppel Croft Farm and Gardens** ([www.keppelcroft.com](http://www.keppelcroft.com)), just east of Big Bay at the northern tip of Grey County, bought their 30.7-hectare farm in 1977, as a summer retreat from their jobs as teachers on Baffin Island. In 1986 they began turning 1.2 to 1.6 hectares into a series of show gardens but "there is no master plan," says Bill. "Our experiences developing the gardens have given us a changing vision of what we hope to achieve."

It has not been easy creating an organic garden here, either. The gardens are on a gravel ridge that was a prehistoric shingle beach.

"A pick and shovel are needed for planting everything," says Bill. "We have to bring in topsoil and dig in composted sheep, cattle- and chicken-manure."

Keppel Croft actually consists of several gardens linked by pathways—rockeries, xeriscape (unwatered) gardens, pebble borders, ponds, a Zen garden, shade garden, even its own Stonehenge (a.k.a. Keppel Henge), where you can use your own shadow to read the time on the analemmatic sundial, inspired by a sundial in the gardens of the papal Palace in Avi-

## Just the facts

- Gardeners in Grey and Bruce Counties website: [www.ruralgardens.ca](http://www.ruralgardens.ca)
- Rural Roots Nature Reserve & Gardens, [www.gardenspirit.ca](http://www.gardenspirit.ca)
- Keppel Croft Farm and Gardens website is [www.keppelcroft.com](http://www.keppelcroft.com)
- Larkwhistle, 519-795-7763
- Earth Bound Perennials and Gardens, 519-534-2483



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This pond haven at Earth Bound Perennials and Gardens, at 14 Hea Rd., Red Bay, is just one of the country delights awaiting visitors on a tour of gardens in Grey Bruce counties. Some gardens offer hiking trails, others have plants or organically grown produce for sale.

gnon. "This was our millennium project," says Dawn.

Bill, who is currently creating an arboretum, has planted more than 50 species of trees on the property.

The couple regularly hosts volunteer guests from around the world who help out in the garden in exchange for room and board.

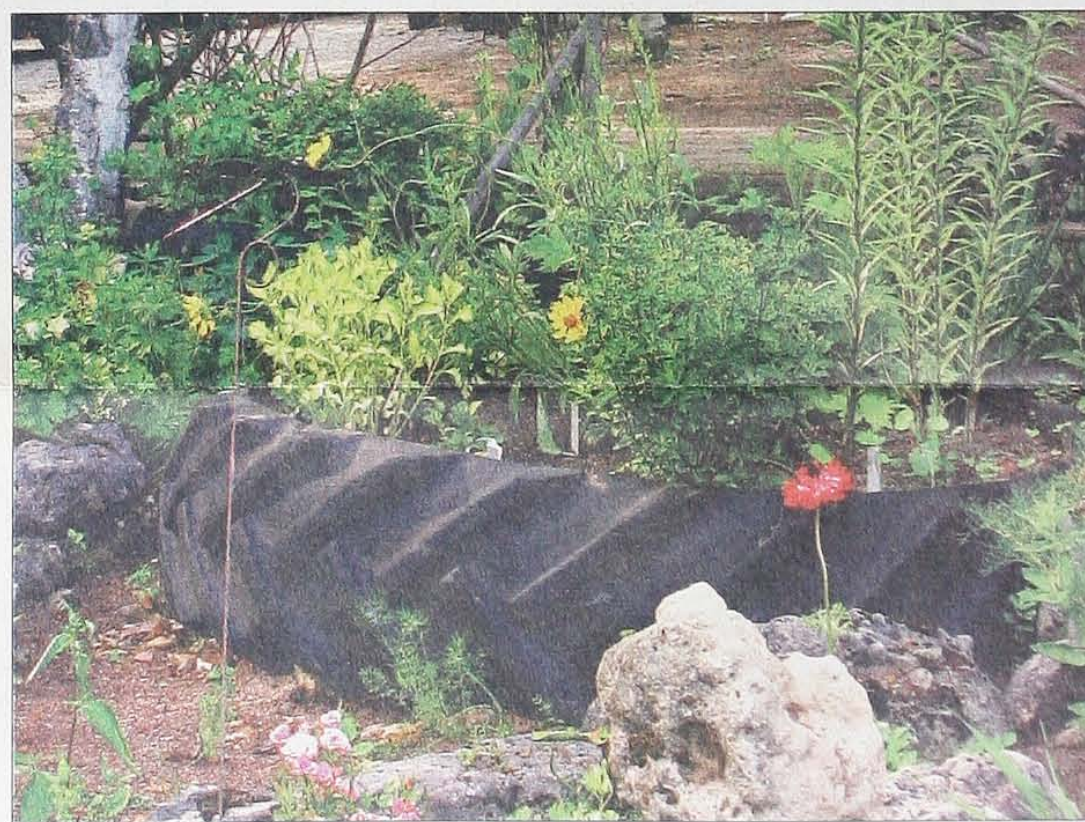
Keppel Croft, which also has a bed and breakfast, offers small group workshops on building tuffa (porous rock) troughs and rock walls.

The owners of **Earth Bound Perennials and Gardens**, 14 Hea Rd., Red Bay, (519-534-2483) are passionate about lilies and daylilies and will have thousands blooming in pots, presenting a rainbow of some 90 colours throughout July and August.

Brenda Sutherland fell in love with lilies at Canada Blooms in Toronto one year when she saw "the most gorgeous bouquet of them at one of the booths. Speaking with the owner, I realized that we probably had ideal conditions for growing them here," she says.

She bought 200 bulbs the first year and wondered if any of them would sell. "But I watched them walk out the door and was hooked," she recalls. "We continued to try different types and colours and through trial and error have become fairly expert on them."

Earth Bound is holding a series of garden parties on Wednesdays in July and August. Guided tours through the evolving 2.2-



LORRAINE HUNTER PHOTO

Recycled tires are used for container gardening at Rural Roots Nature Reserve & Gardens in Wiarton. Gardening here has been a challenge. "There is no soil," explains owner Tom Ashman.

hectare xeriscaped gardens, featuring whole root roses, herbs and heirloom vegetables take place daily at 11 a.m. and/or 3 p.m.

Perhaps the most famous garden in the area is **Larkwhistle**, at 191 Lindsay Rd. 40, Dyers Bay, a lush, half-hectare organic paradise of perennials, herbs and vegetables lovingly developed over the past 30 years from what

was once a farmer's hayfield. The source for many of garden writer Patrick Lima's books and articles and John Scanlon's photos, Larkwhistle inspires and educates (519-795-7763).

Admittance to the gardens of Rural Gardens of Grey and Bruce Counties (RGGB) members is either by set fee or a recommended donation of \$2 a visitor. Each owner determines

any entrance fee.

As you tour the area, you will be able to identify many RGGB gardens by the yellow Daisy signs, similar to the one on their website. Visiting hours include a range of regular, scheduled times as well as "by appointment only" arrangements.

Lorraine Hunter is a Toronto-based freelance writer.