

Garden Conservancy Open Day June 23

By Lucy Apthorp Leske
Contributing Editor

Hard against a bank of *Rosa rugosa*, growing out of a pile of sand in front of the old Shimmo Yacht Club, sits a single yellow-horned seashore poppy. Just steps away, the harbor laps at the edge of the beach as the noon ferry leaves the dock. This is the scene from the deck on one of the properties open to the public next week on Thursday, June 23, as part of the Garden Conservancy's Open Day program on Nantucket.

Five gardens will be featured between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., all in the Monomoy and Shimmo areas, and all with spectacular views of Nantucket Harbor, Coatsue, the town skyline and Nantucket Sound.

Visitors will be hard-pressed to inspect the plants and gardens with such a dramatic backdrop, but I assure you, it is worth turning your attention to the landscape artistry and skill. Some of the gardens contain plants that are as old as the hills while others are newly planted in contemporary style. All are thriving despite considerable disadvantage – namely, exposure to wind and salt as well as hordes of rabbits and deer.

Gardeners who suffer from the latter may learn a thing or two about what works and doesn't work. I saw plenty of rabbits around when I visited, so these owners must have tried, failed and succeeded in their efforts.

One strategy all the homeowners have in common is the use of a mixed palette of native plants in areas that are open to the elements and animals. The garden at 60 Monomoy Road, for instance, is split into two major areas, one between the house and the street that is heavily barricaded and where more tender plants are grown like hosta, lilies and climbing roses, all of them the favorite food of marauding deer. Layered on split levels banked by stone retaining walls and rising to the back where a curved bench sits under overhanging blue atlas cedars, this garden is bursting with color from a beautiful raspberry, white and lemon-yellow color scheme.

On the other side of the house, facing the harbor, the property is not fenced in order that the views can be enjoyed without interruption. Here a simple wisteria arbor shades a view of a boardwalk that stretches across dune and saltmarsh through native ferns, bayberry, cattails, winterberry, groundsel bush and



Photo by Lucy Apthorp Leske

The garden at 46 Shimmo Pond Road, one of five open to the public as part of the Garden Conservancy's Open Day on Nantucket next Thursday.

Gardening by the Sea

native grasses. An emerging perennial hedge of swamp rose mallow and Joe pye weed lines the western edge of the lot, sure to be a stanning show in August.

The garden at 16 Cathcart Road is practically across the street but you have to go the long way around to get there. These owners have planted a creative, if not courageous, mix of native and ornamental shrubs that are thriving in this exposed environment. Sitting on top of the hill, the house is framed in front by lovely ornamental trees including a dwarf ginkgo, naples, stewartia and purple beech.

An expansive lawn encircles the house and extends in front in a large oval down-slope to an inviting gate at the bottom that, presumably, provides access to the end of Monomoy Road and the water's edge beyond. Back up at the house, a bluestone patio and walkways are the perfect complement to a perennial border of catmint, Russian sage, sweet fern, lady's mantle, iris, hydrangeas and fragrant sumac. The whole property is protected by a thick wind-

another evergreen that deer avoid.

Right next door, across the Shimmo Association parking lot, is the garden at 46 Shimmo Pond Road. The approach to the garden through overhanging trees and past a gnarled willow is right out of "Grimm's Fairy Tales." I half expected a troll or other mischievous creature to emerge from the bushes, so when I heard some rustling, I was startled by Nantucket's version: a very large, fat rabbit. Up the hill I went around to the side gate where I was greeted by a sumptuous garden full of color and exquisitely-maintained perennials, punctuated by exciting accent plants like a large, blooming crambie, deep pink climbing roses and melon-colored bearded iris. On the harbor side of the house, a berm frames the view across the water to the channel and is covered with emerging wildflowers including milkweed, Joe pye weed, baptisia and daisies.

These gardens and a fifth at 6 Salt Marsh Road – only open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. – are worth the trip next week. Thirty-four years ago as newlyweds, my spouse and I rented a garage apartment in this area off Brewster Road.

In those days, it seemed that our little love nest was at the edge of civilization with nothing but woods and poison ivy between us and Moors End Farm. To the north and east, vestiges of the old cow pastures and grassy swamps could still be seen among the low hills.

Today, the area is much more densely populated with impressive houses, large landscaped gardens, gates, hedges and, sadly, encroaching alien invasive plants like Japanese knotweed, carted in here in landscape materials and fill. Still, walking, riding one's bike, or driving through these sandy back roads does take one away from the hurly-burly of town. Birds are everywhere, and the smell of wild roses and the sea fills the air.

The Garden Conservancy created the Open Days program in 1995 as a nationwide means of introducing the public to gardening, providing easy access to outstanding examples of design and horticultural practice, and proving that exceptional American gardens are still being created.

More information about the tour including directions and how to obtain tickets may be found at www.opendaysprogram.org.

break of mixed plants including native black cherry and *Leylandii* cypress. In fact, you cannot tour these gardens or any garden on Nantucket, these days, without running into *Leylandii* cypress, a sturdy, fast-growing, salt-tolerant evergreen that is quickly overtaking privet as the hedgerow shrub of choice. Deer do not eat it.

The house with the most interesting history on the garden tour is 42 Shimmo Pond Road. Originally built in the 1920s, the two-story building served as the Shimmo Yacht Club and sits smack dab on the beach where boats and dinghies wait for a spin. Imagine the people who came and went from this place before it became a private home.

I was impressed, again, by the clever way the owners have tried to protect the garden against deer and rabbits, with big sloping terraces behind the house and a strong fence with a clematis-covered arbor. Inside and out are a range of deer and rabbit-proof plants including dogwood, baptisia, ninebark, lupine, spiraea, lady's mantle, salvia, thyme, peonies, and amsonia, another plant that I saw used frequently in the other gardens on the tour. Oh yes, and the hydrangeas were everywhere, as well as boxwood,