

Tour to showcase mountain gardens, growth post-Angora

By Linda Conaboy

In preparation for its ninth annual garden tour, the Lake Tahoe Historical Society recently previewed all nine gardens that will be on view July 29. Five of the gardens are within the Angora burn area.

“It’s always scary to put this together, basically because we have to pick the gardens the year before. We looked at this year’s gardens in August and September last year,” Catherine Whelan, president of the historical society, said. “You just don’t know how gardens will turn out and what winter will do to them”



Creek bed and covered seating area in Marsha Ward-Hudson's garden.

Photos/Linda Conaboy

Whelan said the historical society picks a variety of homes to showcase what can be done in a shade garden, as well as a sunny one and how to approach gardening at various levels – as well as to prove it’s possible to garden in the mountains.

“This year, we’re giving a special nod to the gardens in the Angora burn site. We support all of their struggles,” Whelan told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Traipsing around Debbie and Buzz Bera’s backyard it became apparent – yes, you can garden in the mountains. Although the Bera home wasn’t destroyed in the burn, their garden was singed.

Perennials are the corner stone in this not-too-large yard – bright perennials and the whimsical birdhouse fence tantalize the palette for more. More is the pond and waterfall fenced in by the wall of birdhouses, all on the sunny side of the yard. The shady areas include a greenhouse and enough hostas to add green to an otherwise difficult area to cultivate.

On to Marsha Ward-Hudson’s home on Mt. Olympia Circle. The welcoming front yard has a carefully manicured lawn with lots of plantings surrounding the large porch. To get to the back, the preview party marched along stepping stones buried in verdant and pillowy ground cover, the kind that makes one want to take her shoes off to see if it’s really as soft as it looks.

Who would think you could grow lush ground cover like this in the mountains? Believe it. In the backyard, a faux creek bed winds its way from the vegetable garden, along the lawn’s curvy edge to the covered patio.



Landscaping with natural elements at the Cressy home.

Ward-Hudson utilizes old tires filled with what looks like well-amended soil to cage her veggies. Like other yards here, this one suffered from the fire retardant used to smother the fire; however, about two feet of new topsoil seems to be providing ample nutrients for the multitude of flowers and emerging vegetables.

The third stop, the Angora Community Demonstration Garden proved to be a bittersweet one, for this is where Owen and Esther Evans once had a home. It was one of the 254 lost in the fire of 2007. Because of age, the Evans decided not to rebuild, but chose to create a garden to give back to their neighborhood.

A sign on the property states this collaborative garden is a model of water conservation, best management practices, defensible space and beauty. All of which became apparent by a stroll along the paths where various flowers, vegetables, ground covers and strawberry vines grow in profusion.

Like so many others, Lisa and Joe McAvoy not only had to plant another garden; they also had to rebuild their home, a task completed mainly by Joe McAvoy with a little help from his friends.

Lisa was responsible for the garden. Like the house, this, too, was a labor of love. With John Fellowes at Aspen Hollow Nursery, McAvoy created a visually resplendent and artful outdoor scene. "It's going to be a forest," McAvoy said. "To make way for new things, I keep moving plants around."



Birdhouse fence at Debbie and Buzz Bera's home.

What has resulted, among the well-placed boulders, lush foliage and a water feature that looks like a natural oasis in this garden is a lovely place to sit and contemplate the magnificent mountain views. But look the other way for a reminder of the fire as blackened trees rise on the mountain in front of the house.

When visiting, be sure to check out the fanciful garden art and various sitting areas in the McAvoy gardens.

It's hard to believe what has been resurrected from the Angora disaster, especially when visiting Brooks and Karen Martin's home and garden.

Brooks Martin said they had put the finishing touches on their garden just before the fire (a two-year project with the help of John Fellowes), only to have their home and their garden disappear the next day.

"All that made it through the fire were the prayer flags, the Quan Yin statue and the statue of St. Francis," Brooks said.

A fresh start among their huge, natural boulders, the likes of which you may remember from the fictional Ponderosa Ranch, features multiple outdoor seating areas, a large water feature and even some tiny mushrooms sprouting on the home's north side.

The seating areas are arranged to catch the day's lighting as it strobescs across the landscape – there's lots of shade for hot Tahoe days and sun when it's needed.

Next, on down the hill and off of Pioneer Trail for neighboring homes owned by the Cressy and Williams families.

Although both of these houses have the same gardening conditions in their adjoining yards, each was treated to a different landscape. Jennifer Cressy, who, along with John Roos, is in charge of the demonstration garden at Lake Tahoe Community College, used all-natural vegetation in her yard, while the Williams produced more formal grounds amidst the towering evergreen trees.

Daniel Cressy designed and installed the many fountains in his yard, while the Williams opted for an in-ground koi pond, minus koi. In the Williams' yard it's interesting to note the juxtaposition of natural vegetation, fountains and succulents tucked into the landscape among the pines.

From the street, Stephanie and Neal Niederman's home is a delight. Walking from the side to the back yard it's easy to realize these folks have spent a lot of time and a great deal of effort on their yard.



Garden at the Niederman home.

"Our whole life is here," Stephanie Niederman said. "And the

plant of the year is delphinium.” Her tall and hearty delphiniums are enough to make even an inveterate gardener envious.

“The secret to our garden is well-amended soil,” a thought echoed by nearly all the gardeners on our tour. The Niederman side yard is a plethora of green grass and plants that flourish in the shade, as evidenced by the healthy hostas lounging at the edge of the grass. The sun-loving varieties, grown from Stephanie’s penchant for purchasing flower six-packs are happy too.

The last garden is Carole Spreklesen Foster’s. There is a lush garden cultivated on her original home site as well as the adjoining lot she purchased so she could grow more plants.

This is where you will find food, some provided by Harrah’s and Harveys, libations, and music courtesy of Dream Spirit Baroque Band, all to be enjoyed in Foster’s park – at least that’s what it may remind you of. Don’t forget to check out her authentic teepee, filled with all things Native American. The colt’s foot and Japanese willows are just two of the unique plants Spreklesen Foster grows.

Although Spreklesen Foster’s home is listed last on the tour, if it’s more convenient, there’s no need to visit it last. Food and drink will be served there all day.

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Details:

When: July 29

Time: 10 am-4 pm

Price: \$20

Tickets are available from: Tahoe Outdoor Living, Aspen Hollow Nursery, Nel’s Garden Center, Sunbasin Nursery and at the

Historical Society at 3058 Lake Tahoe Blvd. If there are tickets left, purchase them the day of the event at the Historical Society.