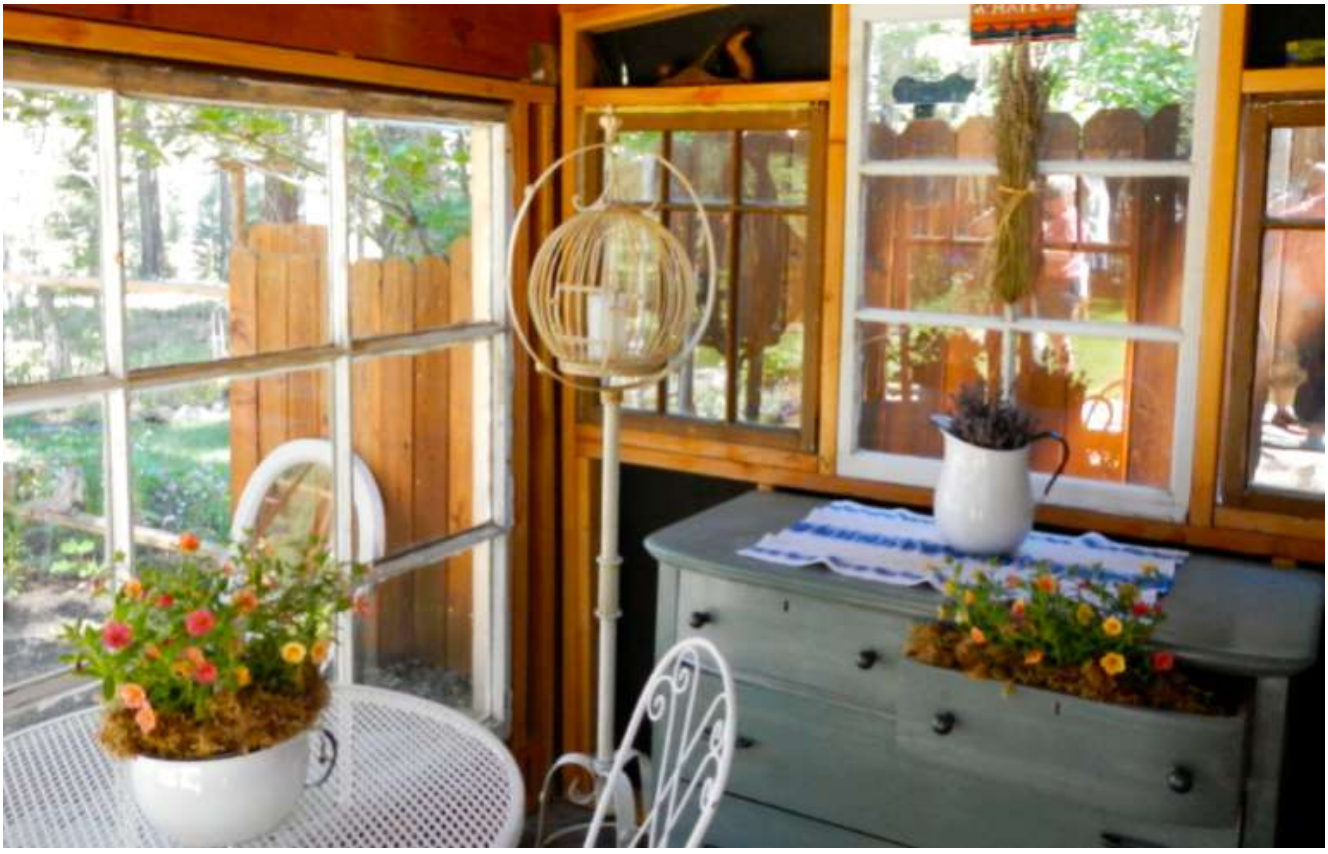
Garden tour grows into colorful celebration

By Kathryn Reed

A 95-year-old house with a garden that had been certified by the National Wildlife Federation as a wildlife habitat and is on the national registry, a garden that flows into a golf course, one full of veggies, another with antiques that have become yard art to house flowers, some in full shade, others in full sun. A kaleidoscope of colors. A sea of green.

“Eye candy” is how one garden is described. “What is her secret?” someone asks about all those peonies.

One homeowner admits the slope of her yard means it’s 20 degrees cooler at the bottom – just one of her dilemmas. Two owners each have to contend with maintaining an acre of land – and not in a wild, Tahoe pinecone kind of way.



Known as the Tallac Shack because of the view of the mountain, this morning coffee or afternoon wine spot even has flowers in a dresser drawer. Photos/Kathryn Reed

These nine gardens that will be featured July 27 on the Lake Tahoe Historical Society's garden tour are some of the best ones from the past 10 years. All have been showcased once before. This is the 10-year anniversary edition of the tour.

Homeowners got to see the other gardens on Saturday, while organizers checked things out to make sure everything is ready for the annual event. This tour is the historical society's No. 1 fundraiser. The 300 $25 tickets sell out each year.

It's a mix of locals and out-of-towners who come each year. Locals like to see what is able to grow in Tahoe, and visitors make this the reason they come to town this time of year.

What grows is so much more than the native plants and wildflowers agencies talk about. Weeping cherry trees, Japanese maples, meadow rue and grapes are some of the less common items found along the tour.

"For our anniversary tour we tried to pick ones that were all a little different," Catherine Whelan with the historical society told *Lake Tahoe News*. Her home, which was first on the tour in 2006, is one of the first houses to visit this year.

She grew up coming to Tahoe to visit her grandparents, and eventually the house became hers. Whelan said her grandmother would keep trying different things to see what would work. Now it's like walking through a gate into a lush, shade-filled oasis.

Ann Rasmussen said when her home was on the tour in 2003 it was just after she and her husband, Gene, had remodeled. The yard had basically been a construction site. Today, it's all about maintenance.

She points to the rock work on the house that is covered by the green in the garden. Now she wonders why they thought the rock was a good idea.

Each garden is unique, but many on this tour have views of Mount Tallac. And the owners – they all seem fit – which might prove gardening is a form of exercise. Even so, most gardens have multiple places to sit and enjoy the surroundings – proving it’s not all about working.

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Notes:

• Tickets are $25; available at the museum (3058 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe) and at Aspen Hollow, Nels, Sunbasin and Tahoe Outdoor Living.

• Event is July 27, 10am-4pm.

• Barton Memorial Hospital’s gardens are the final stop.

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