

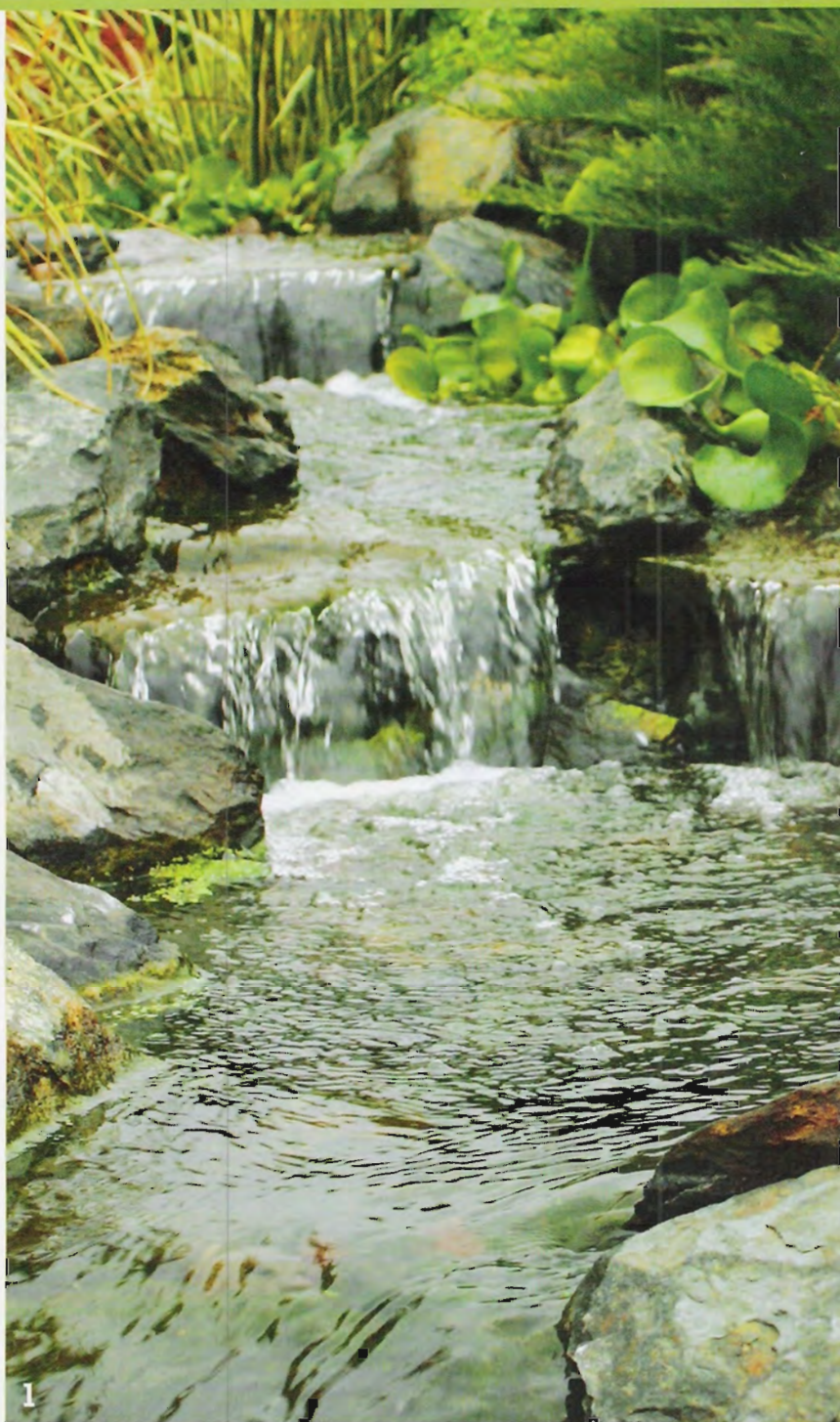
# 7 GREAT GARDENS IN THE 'BURBS

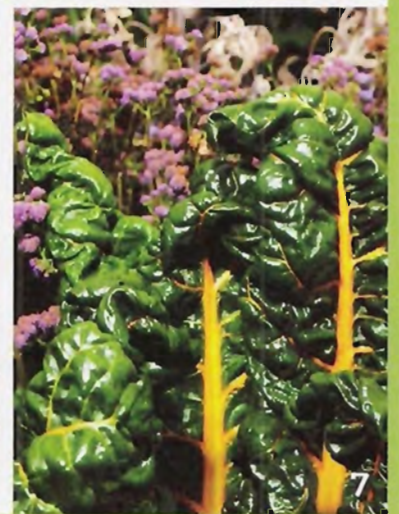


From ponds to prairies to flowers through the seasons, these seven gorgeous residential gardens have earned top billing from Olbrich Botanical Gardens. See for yourself how luscious and lovely they are.

**BY KATHRYN KINGSBURY**

PHOTOS BY JAMIE L. FORREST







For 20 years, the Olbrich Botanical Society's annual Home Garden Tour has introduced Madisonians to some of the area's finest residential landscapes. And if there's been one consistent theme, it's that there's no one right way to grow a beautiful garden. This year's tour, titled Westside Explorations, continues this fine tradition. As a visitor to seven home gardens in Middleton and Verona, you will see flower borders abounding in annuals and others eschewing them, water ponds with fish and without, and color schemes ranging from boisterous to monochromatic. You'll have the chance to compare several approaches to the single theme of native landscaping, from incorporating native perennials into a traditional flower border to planting a multiple-acre prairie. But, most importantly, you will leave full of inspiration for nurturing a world of green at your own doorstep.

## MIDDLETON

**1.** Linda Grosz loves plants that highlight Wisconsin's shifting seasons: bulbs that bloom in early spring, lilac's fleeting but intoxicating May fragrance, shrubs that turn brilliant oranges and reds in fall. "I spent most of my adult life in Los Angeles and missed the seasons," she says.

The space just behind the house she shares with husband Phil in Middleton features a waterfall and pond, an apple tree and a pear tree (just because she couldn't grow them in L.A., she says), and a myriad of roses, daylilies and dozens of other hardy perennials. Further out is a generous prairie planting – another gardening feat that would be impossible on the West

Coast but thrives at home in the Midwest.

**2.** The garden of Jill and Tim Sherry has enough variety all by itself to constitute a full day of touring. The family has lived on the property since 1989 and "started out small ... with a butterfly garden," says Jill.

The current landscape is anything but small and includes a grass garden, a shade garden and an expansive prairie behind the house. "Our property was a natural prairie at some point in time," says Jill. "We grew tired of mowing ... and decided to let the grass grow and see what happened. Well, we had wonderful asters and goldenrods grow. So we expanded on the prairie by adding seeds and plant plugs. The prairie is

constantly being added to." Favorite plants include the natives black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* spp.) and Culver's root, which produces a flower cluster reminiscent of a white candle.

## VERONA

**3.** With its meandering curves and gurgling waterfalls, the three-tiered pond in the backyard of Chris and Steve Liethen looks like it was carved into the landscape centuries ago by rain and snow. In truth, the couple installed it only four years ago, and just last fall visitors could find Steve waist-deep in the drained-out lower pond, expanding it and laying a new lining to replace the one that one of the family's dogs dug up while on an impromptu (and officially unsanctioned) swim. Large, flat boulders here and there offer resting spots and add to the illusion that a series of serendipitous geological events, not hard work, created this sanctuary.

**4.** Step through the arborvitae at one end of the Liethen's property and enter a completely different sort of retreat. Charlie and Shelly Thieme's cottage-style garden is replete with climbing roses. They ramble through the openings of the gazebo-style porch and up lattice supports on the house's exterior walls. Fanciful birdhouses painted by



Shelly, an artist by trade, look almost too lovely to share with wildlife. But the couple has been thrilled to find avian families raising their broods in the custom-made condos.

Bare of flowers when the Thiemes moved in eight years ago, the garden is now brimming with blooms. "What we try to do is blend perennials with annuals to maintain color throughout the whole summer," says Charlie, who has a fondness for lupines and hardy hibiscus.

**5.** Across the street, Louise and Dave Stephenson's front porch is flanked by some of the most robust potted annuals you might ever see outside of a botanical garden. Walk around back for a calming view of rolling hills and sweeping farm fields that recall the open prairie that once stood here. So do the many native perennials that the Stephensons have worked into their traditional garden setting.

One style of plant you won't find much here is the foundation shrub. Through their sixteen years in this house, the Stephensons have progressively removed most of the bushes surrounding their house. Woody plants just aren't their style, Louise says, but she makes exceptions for a few flowering types, especially hydrangeas.

**6.** Many gardeners find themselves constantly tweaking their landscapes – moving shrubs, pulling out aggressive perennials, shoehorning some newly discovered sedum into the rock garden – in pursuit of an elusive perfection. But Mary Lou Rashke says the one-and-a-half-acre prairie she planted behind her home eleven years ago requires no such tweaking. Every few years in late winter, Mary Lou and her husband John burn the dried plant tops, imitating the soil-enriching seasonal fire cycle in which these plants evolved. Other than that, the prairie is low-maintenance. "It gets better and better every year all on its own," she says.

Since no gardener wants to live a life completely free of toil, Rashke started a high-maintenance rock garden in 1995 and a pond in 1999. But Rashke eventually had enough of tending to the rock garden plants' finicky demands. "I just let the prairie plants take over."

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**7.** JoAnne Kriege has grown virtually everything in her lush garden from seed. In early spring, she starts ninety-one flats indoors of dozens of annuals such as Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia rotundifolia*), lacy bishop's flower (*Ammi majus*), and chard (grown for its colorful stems) under fluorescent lights. Other mainstays, such as jimson weed (*Datura innoxia*) and verbena vonariensis, reseed themselves each year.

By planting from seed, Kriege gets the joy of starting the gardening season a little earlier than most folks. An additional boon is that she can grow a much wider variety of flowers than if she only purchased seedlings. "There are so many fun ones that you wouldn't see in the nursery," she says.

**The 2005 Olbrich Home Garden Tour: Westside Explorations**  
**Friday, July 15, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.**  
**Saturday, July 16, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.,**  
 rain or shine.

**Advance tickets are \$10 for Olbrich members, \$12 for the general public.**

**Tickets may also be purchased onsite, \$12 for members and \$15 for the general public.**

**More information is available on Olbrich Botanical Gardens' website: [www.olbrich.org](http://www.olbrich.org).**