

The Peace Garden at Forest Home Chapel

It doesn't take long for a gardener to learn that gardens are not forever. There's weather, drainage, varmints, insects and disease. If the garden is close to a road, snowplows may come too close to the plants, and even perennials have limited life spans.

Established in 2001, this small, Forest Home Chapel perennial garden is right next to such a road and has coexisted with all the above challenges including plans (still not funded) by the Town of Ithaca to build a sidewalk and widen the road, and two bouts of our own construction projects. All of which means large machinery and big boots.

Still the little garden thrives with a succession of bloom from April through September, which is hard to imagine in such a small space, approximately 10x18 feet. Dubbed the "Peace Garden," it was funded by Chapel members who donated in memory of beloved friends and family, and the efforts of Alphonse Pieper who hauled aging manure from the Cornell poultry barns to work into the soil. It is blessed with perfect drainage and sun from mid-morning on. Designed and maintained by Elizabeth Mount, it is low maintenance except for the usual bursts of clean-up in early spring and late fall, fertilizing, and cutting back to encourage new foliage to grow.

So what about those blooms? Spring brings pure white candytuft (*Iberis sempervirens* 'Snowflake'). Wedgewood blue iris follow, plus a succession of deer-resistant, nicely spreading cranesbills (*Geranium Sanguineum*, *Endressii* 'A.T. Johnson', *Cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo,' x *Magnificum*, and *Macrorrhizum* 'Ingwerson's Variety'), in shades of purples and pinks.

In June, magenta peonies blend with the cranesbills and the deep purple sages (*Salvia nemerosa* 'East Friesland' and "May Night'). Catmint (*nepeta mussini*) is the kind of low growing mound that is valued more for its foliage than its bloom. Furry, gray lambs ears (*Stachys byzantina*) is another good foliage plant. Gardeners also learn that a garden is never "done". The daylilies fell prey to both the construction and the deer which cross the creek from the direction of the Cornell Plantations. The pink mat of creeping thymes was also doomed by construction, but was replaced by a handsome boulder from out of the depths when new basement stairs were constructed in 2013. The solidity of this "memory stone" reminds us all of the passage of time.

Because each perennial only blooms for a few weeks, the garden does have some self-seeders: half-hardy pot marigolds (*calendula*); biennial poppies (*Papaver somniferum*); and sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*), all of which bloom reliably as volunteers. Poppies leave handsome seed pods and alyssum can bloom until Thanksgiving time.

Early July brings the purple spikes of lavender (*Lavendula* 'Hidcote') which complement their own gray needles and the Llenroc stone planter which supports the Chapel's sign. Late July brings on the lavender globes that hover over the low-growing prairie onions (*allium stellatum*), and highlights the white chrysanthemums (*Leucanthemum* 'Becky') which bloom tirelessly, with deadheading, for 3-4 weeks.

And finally, fall kicks in with tall, pink obedient plant, also called false dragonhead (*Physostegia virginiana*), mauve *Chrysanthemums* 'Ithaca hardy', and the pink, cuplike, dwarf anemones, which were acquired by mistake (*thus nameless!*) but treasured because they do not flop. If it's mild, these fall bloomers can hold on for a long time.

One benefit of this garden is that it is open and up close for all passersby — drivers, joggers, bikers and walkers. It encourages a sense of neighborliness. As for the gardener, it has been a way of meeting people who ask about the plants and the church, which turned 100 this year! We are very proud.

Elizabeth Mount, June, 2016