

The evolving garden

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A garden, full of life, evolves over time.

Here are some factors that drive change in a garden.

1. Trends in Landscaping.

Frederick Law Olmsted, 1822 to 1903, is one of the most famous and influential American landscapers. He designed 20+ public parks and parkways, making full use of naturally occurring features and plants. His landscaping company designed The Rocks formal garden in Bethlehem. Today, two considerations have become important in garden design and planting:

use of native plants and plants needed by pollinators. Incorporating these into a garden dramatically changes the visual aspect.

In drier parts of the country, thirsty lawns are being replaced by cacti, and native grasses

This is called xeriscaping. An added bonus is low maintenance and no use of fertilizer/weed-killer.

2. Climate Change.

Fifty years ago, Littleton was in Zone 3 of the USDA Climate Zone classification. Now it's Zone 4b as our planet has warmed. Plants which previously would not have survived here can flourish. There are many roses that fall into this category, also plants such as the hydrangea 'Endless Summer' which can be found at your local box store. It will bloom reliably even after a colder winter!

3. The Gardeners.

In my younger days, I loved colorful beds in full sun. Now I'm less tolerant of heat. I like to garden in the shade & appreciate range of shapes, textures and colors in Heuchera, Hosta and ferns. I am less energetic and look for ways to simplify. There are perennials that seldom need to be divided, such as peonies and Amsonia. Also ones that do not need deadheading, such as coreopsis and ornamental grasses. If there is no need to stake, so much the better. Look for shorter varieties of Shasta daisies and Phlox Paniculata. A tip from a landscaper gardener friend is to cut back tall August blooming perennials a little in May or June and they will make a great show and be easier to manage. Replace perennials with flowering shrubs. Do research and

find plants resistant to disease and insects.

Your garden may change; it will still be beautiful, and you will not be so tired!

Partone

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The formal garden at The Rocks in Bethlehem is an example of a garden that has changed with the times. The property was purchased by the Glessner family in 1882 after they vacationed in Twin Mountain for several years. The Glessners were friends of Frederick Law Olmsted, the United States' pre-eminent landscape architect, who designed Central Park in New York, the Biltmore Estate, an extensive system of parkways in Boston and numerous other public parks. Olmsted believed in using natural features in garden design, and put this into action close by the big house.

In 1914, Olmsted's son redesigned the formal garden creating three terraces with supporting rock walls which are a delightful feature of the garden today.

Four hired gardeners grew flowers for daily arrangements & vegetables for the family and estate laborers. Later, steps, were added. Were the occasional handrail a safety measure for older family members?

Over the years, the estate saw fewer summer visits by the Glessners and friends. Maintaining the estate was expensive. Many original buildings were taken down or fell down. By the 70s the estate continued to be used by a dairy farmer and grass for hay was grown. In 1978, Martha Batchelder and John Lee, grandchildren of the Glessners donated the estate to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. They chose the Forest Society in part because their grandfather was one of its first members. Christmas trees were grown in compliance with the Glessner family's stipulation that a crop should be grown on the farm. There were no longer four hired helpers, and time for only minimal maintenance of the formal garden.

About 25 years ago garden work resumed. Overshadowing balsam and spruce were cut to allow light into the beds. Apple trees were planted. Only the hardiest plantings survived as nature took its course. Irises, Hostas, wild day lilies and daffodils flourished, along with wild flowers

from the surrounding woods. Some flower beds were replaced by lawn.

About 15 years ago, volunteers took over the garden. Huge clumps of lilies, hosts and irises were removed and perennials brought in from volunteers' gardens. Nowadays, the flower beds are raked, fertilized, mulched and weeded on a regular basis.

More changes are coming to the gardens at The Rocks. An area has been planted at the entrance to the Carriage Barn. Plantings reflect a recent important movement to provide plants for pollinators. Showy, non-native plants grown in huge greenhouses frequently have been genetically altered so that they no longer provide insects with pollen. A large area is being planted with a

mixture of native wildflowers such as milkweed and cone flower and woodland plants such as foam flower, and cranes bill, also non-native plants such as delphinium and foxglove that are attractive to pollinators. There will also be shrubs for pollinators, such as Clethra and Mountain laurel.

Information about these native plantings will be available to the visiting public.

Flower beds at The Rocks are no longer the preserve of a family, but are for all of us, including our essential insects, to enjoy. The Rocks gardens are open to the public year-round.

For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit www.littletongardenclub.org.

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