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JARS v54n4 - The Oregon Garden: A Joint Venture

THE OREGON GARDEN: A JOINT VENTURE

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Vida, Oregon

The Oregon Garden, a unique public/private venture, is drawing attention from all over the world. When the Oregon Association of Nurserymen (OAN) and the City of Silverton, Oregon, joined forces to create a world class botanical garden and solve Silverton's wastewater and wetland mitigation issues, an OAN dream was realized.

In the late 1940s the OAN first considered the idea of a botanical garden to showcase their industry.* By 1990, as Oregon's population and land prices soared, the OAN realized the imperative need to secure a site. Serendipitously and simultaneously, the City of Silverton was pressed to address two water-related issues: 1) treated wastewater discharged into local Silver Creek was too concentrated, and 2) new wetlands needed to be created to mitigate those destroyed by development. These coinciding pressures resulted in an offer by Silverton to buy a defunct horse ranch just south of the city and lease it to the OAN for 99 years. In return, the OAN's proposed garden project would be designed to utilize the city's wastewater effluent as well as provide acreage to create the required mitigated wetlands. The concept proved viable and support was broad-based and enthusiastic.

As a result, in 1996 the Oregon Nurserymen's Garden Foundation was formed and set about to guide a capital funding strategy campaign for the 240-acre garden project. A 20-year master plan was subsequently developed during a week-long collaborative professional design process. A day-long symposium was held also of representatives from industry, government, education, and tourism along with Foundation board members and local citizens. "The Oregon Garden" was chosen as the name for this magnificent work, and to quote Rick Gustafson, Foundation Executive Director, "The theme for using Oregon in the name was obvious - it's for the people who live here and who are so full of pride. This will be their showcase."

The Garden's mission statement proclaims, "The Oregon Garden will be a place to exercise the imagination. While experiencing the remarkable scents and textures of this garden, visitors will see adaptive gardening techniques, such as wheelchair-accessible vertical wall gardens. The priority is to serve people with specific enjoyment of all." As it unfolds, the Oregon Garden is meeting the following goals:

- To Be a Living Laboratory of Research and Study
- To Evolve into a Key Tourism Destination by 2010
- To Celebrate Oregon's Agricultural Tradition
- To Educate the Public About Responsible Gardening...and Environmental Stewardship
- To Enhance the Quality of Life for Visitors and Local Citizens Alike.

On June 28, 1997, as directors and guests sat on bales of hay in the horse pasture, a groundbreaking ceremony for the garden was held. Construction of Phase I, comprised of a \$20 million budget and 60-acres, began construction in 1998 with grading, utility installation, conversion of a horse barn into an events pavilion, and wetlands development.

Also part of Phase I improvements is the innovative use of the City of Silverton's wastewater, an integral element of the Oregon Garden. Silverton's wastewater is first treated in a state-of-the-art treatment plant, meeting all requirements of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; and during Oregon's drier months (May through October) is piped to a multi-pond water feature at the garden. Entering the system at the uppermost of 16 ponds, the wastewater cascades down a 37-foot grade through the first eleven ponds at a rate of flow that facilitates plants' uptake of nutrients from the water and hence provides a filtering effect upon the water. Along the way some of the water is diverted to two subterranean 3,500-gallon storage tanks and is later used for irrigation of the garden. The balance of the water continues to the lower wetlands, although most of it evaporates before reaching the lower four ponds. That which reaches the wetlands has been filtered by the complete system, "a synthesis of aesthetics and utility."

Actual planting of the garden began in 1999 and the central walkway system was completed. An inaugural season performance in the Teufel Amphitheater by the Oregon Symphony Orchestra kicked off the first of the Oregon Garden's annual Summer Concert Series with the beauty of Oregon sunsets shining through silhouettes of fine old trees in the Oak Grove.

In 2000 the Oregon Garden pulses with construction in earnest and is open to visitors seven days a week at no charge for the Preview 2000 Season. Jack Long, president of the Oregon Garden Foundation mused, "I knew that if you build it they will come, but we aren't even finished and they're coming...almost every person...had no idea of the scope and size of the Oregon Garden." He was right - by the thousands they are coming!

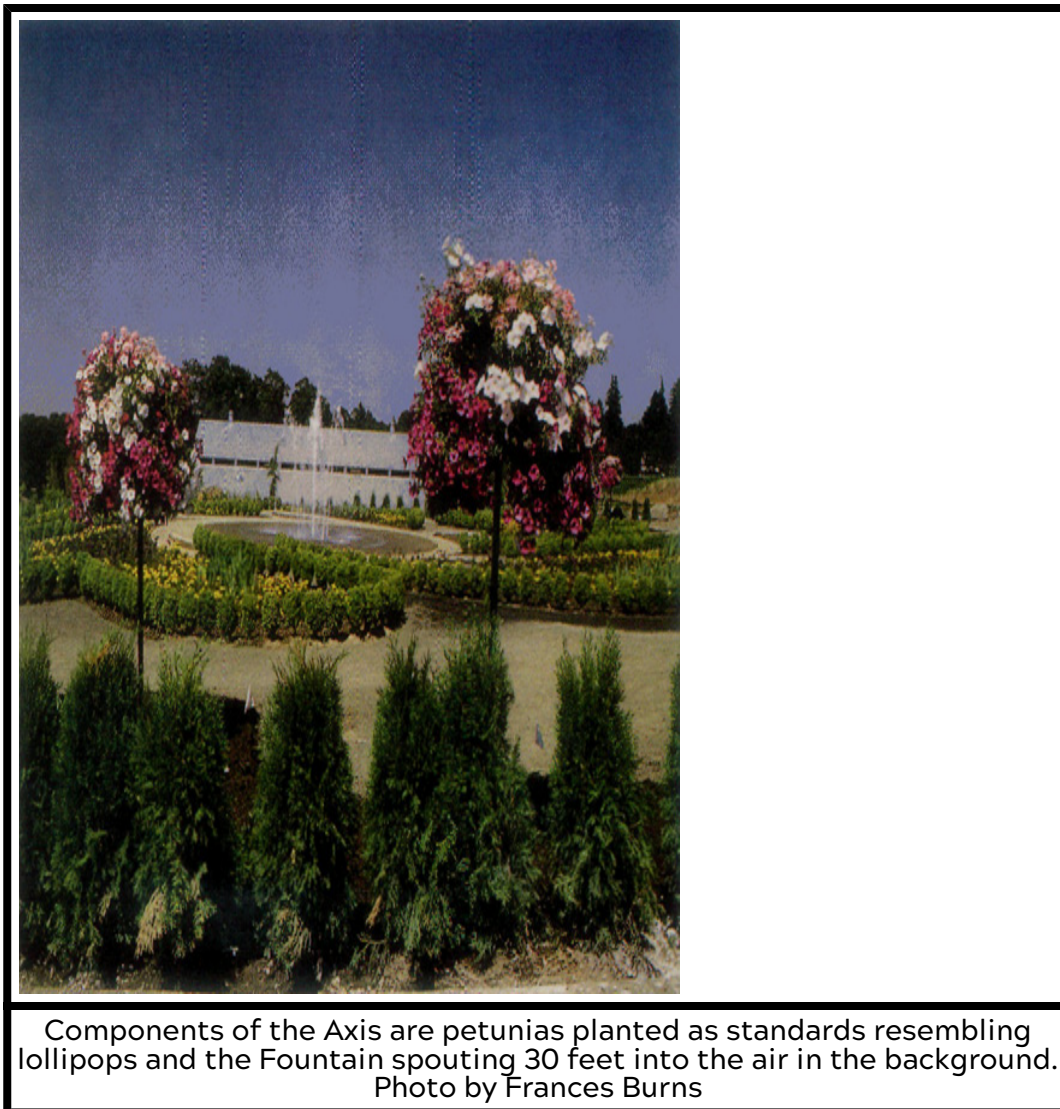
The Grand Opening will be celebrated in summer 2001, and admission will be charged for the first time. But as real gardeners know, a garden is never finished, changing with the seasons and over the years. The Oregon Garden has only just begun - a masterpiece that will grow for generations. Comprehensive on-site signing, plant labeling, and a newsletter to keep members informed are ongoing projects. Supplementary literature and lists of garden plants will be available in the gift shop at the Grand Opening.

Featured Areas of the Oregon Garden:

The Frank Schmidt Jr. Pavilion , a 20,000 square-foot full service event facility, was dedicated in April 2000. Named in honor of J. Frank Schmidt, Jr., the Pavilion is already recognized as one of the most popular halls in Marion County, and is booked months in advance for dinners, parties, weddings and other functions. Schmidt, 81, and son of a German immigrant family, got his start pulling weeds on his father's nursery in Portland. His early donation of \$500,000 through the J. Frank Schmidt Family Charitable Foundation was a major step in creating the Oregon Garden six years ago. Housing the Oregon Nurserymen's Hall of Fame, the building sits atop a grassy hill overlooking the Willamette Valley. From this vantage point, the hills of Dundee may be seen to the north, and to the west Mary's Peak rises from the Oregon Coastal Range which separates the Willamette Valley from the Pacific Ocean.

The Rose Garden , sponsored by Jackson & Perkins, was dedicated June 25, 2000, as an official Portland Rose Festival event: Jackson & Perkins introduced its new 'Veteran's Honor' rose - now grown only in Arlington National Cemetery and here in the Oregon Garden. Perennials are incorporated among the 300 rose plants of ten different varieties, all provided by Jackson & Perkins. The color and scent on a warm summer day are mesmerizing.

The Axis , a linear organizing element of the Garden extending to the top of the hill, features at its beginning the Fountain. Cascading 30 feet into the air, the water descends in a petal design when seen from overhead. Colorful seasonal plants are enclosed by a trellis system, while petunias planted as standards resemble luscious lollipops. In Phase II development, additional display gardens will be created along the Axis, leading the way to a future conservatory atop the hill. Flanked by the Rose Garden and the Fountain, and adjacent to the Schmidt Pavilion, the Garden Green will accommodate large numbers of people and is a site for outdoor weddings and picnics. It is a transition space to other points of interest in the garden as well.



Components of the Axis are petunias planted as standards resembling lollipops and the Fountain spouting 30 feet into the air in the background.
Photo by Frances Burns

The Teufel Amphitheater nearby can accommodate 3,000 people with sand chairs or blankets to enjoy a picnic while enjoying any of the six artistic performances scheduled during the summers. Food and beverages are available at the concerts, or may be brought from home. No outside alcoholic beverages are permitted.

The Northwest Collection showcases perennials and shrubs produced in the Northwest. Over 100 trees grown in Oregon nurseries form the backbone structure. Monrovia Nursery, one of several sponsors, is working with the Audubon Society to include an educational area featuring plants appropriate as bird food and habitation. Monrovia will include an area of tropical plants in their portion of the garden. Hines Nursery will integrate a large complement of seasonal color and shrubs in a structured area of trees. A perennial walk along the border of the Oak Grove will be established by Etera Nursery.



A 450-year-old oak (*Quercus garryana*)
grows in the Oak Grove, a 25-acre site.
Photo by Frances Burns

The Oak Grove is a 25-acre site of large native Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*) trees averaging 150 to 200 years of age. A trail system will allow visitors to walk among oaks for a close-up experience. Interpretive signs will describe the history of the area. School programs in botany, geology, ecology and history will be developed for visiting students. The Signature Oak, estimated to be more than 499 years old, is recognized as a Heritage Tree for Marion County. Towering 99 feet, its trunk measures 22 feet 10 inches in circumference. Native plants will be conserved by removal of invasive plants such as Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor*) and Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*). The native snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) and other shrubs such as dewberry (*Rubus*) are flagged to ensure that they remain. Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), used medicinally by native Americans, are left to flourish as they once did (one way of keeping visitors on the paths!). Chocolate lily (*Fritillaria lanceolata*), Western columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*), and other native wildflowers are encouraged. In a swale north of the Signature Oak, a glorious display of blue-purple camas (*Camassia quamash*) and flowering of native dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*) delight the eye in season. A generous grant honoring the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde was received from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund to restore the grove to the way it was before European settlers arrived 150 years ago. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is assessing the meadow in the center of the Oak Grove as a potential nesting habitat for grassland birds. On the path to the Children's Garden, a large wrought iron pergola with inviting benches inside provides a view of the Fountain, the Pavilion and vistas in the distance. Yellow roses and decorative vines have been planted to climb up the black "stays" of the round pergola - a stunning sight "growing into the future."



A large wrought iron pergola with inviting benches provides a view of the Fountain, Pavilion, and vistas in the distance.
Photo by Frances Burns

The Children's Garden is sure to make one wish to be a kid again! Nearly an acre of ground features not only the miniature Amphitheater for story telling, puppet shows and other delights, such as a Creation Station, Ladybug Miniature Garden, Menagerie Garden, Bamboo Grove, Dinosaur Digs (sandbox with buried bones for a youngster's anthropological search), a Weird Plant Garden, an open-sided Taper Tunnel that recedes in height until only a small child can pass through, and the Friendship Wall of Hand Prints, where for a \$100 donation a tile may be imprinted permanently with a child's handprint. As it changes with the seasons, there is always something new to anticipate in the Children's Garden, generously sponsored by the Orville Roth family. All vegetation in this area is non-toxic.



An acre of ground devoted to the Children's Garden includes the Turtle Path.
Photo by Frances Burns

The Conifer Garden , sponsored by the Western Region of the American Conifer Society, displays hundreds of cone-bearing plants in all sizes, shapes, textures and colors. Many have limited growth rates, some as small as $\frac{1}{4}$ inch a year. Some of the more unusual include: a Japanese weeping maple (*Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum*) with eight different Japanese maple varieties grafted onto one plant; a blue Spanish fir (*Abies pinsapo* 'Glauca'); lodge pole pine (*Pinus contorta* 'Chief Joseph') - dark green in summer and golden yellow in winter, and three weeping giant sequoia (*Sequoia giganteum* 'Pendulum'). A design arrangement of solid columnar basalt from the Columbia River Gorge makes a stunning statement. The linear chunks of basalt are interplanted with small conifers from round the world.

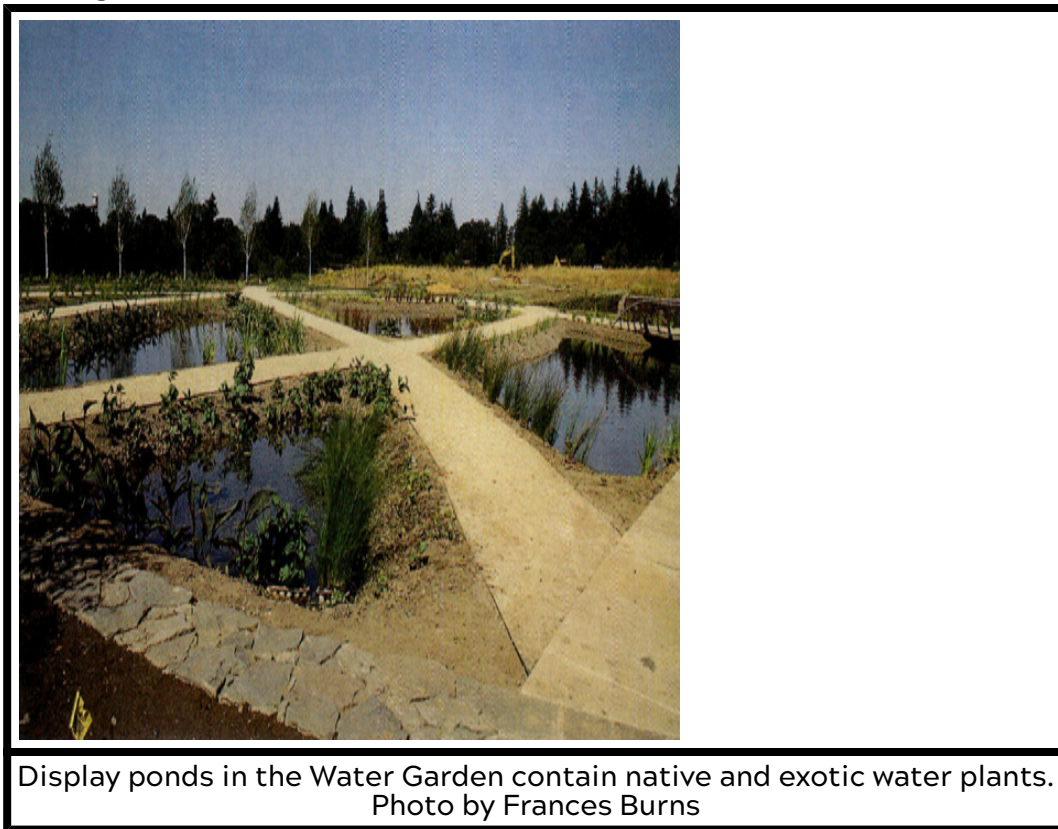


In the Conifer Garden, columns of basalt rock from the Columbia River Gorge are interplanted with conifers from around the world.
Photo by Frances Burns

The Bosque (bosque = thicket in French) at the crossroads of the Oregon Garden is an intriguing design created to reveal the beauty of a man-made landscape. An orderly group of forty large trees of white ash (*Fraxinus americana* 'Autumn Purple') are planted individually in large ebony-colored concrete boxes situated with geometric precision in a Reflecting Pond. The colorful foliage will cast a spell above, as well as mirror beautifully in the pond beneath.

In front of the Schmidt Jr. Pavilion, the Waterfall leaps boldly over a structure of rock from the Columbia Gorge. It was created by Eammon Hughes, who donated the entire structure and plantings. A smaller version of same design is located on the Garden Green, using rock native to the site. (Large boulders from the site, in plentiful supply, are incorporated dramatically in rockwork designs throughout the gardens.)

The water garden consists of the aforementioned five acres of wetlands transformed into a maze-like garden. Included in the design are the Amazing Water Garden, the Wildlife and Educational Wetland, and the Ornamental Water Gardens. The whole is a beautiful example combining wildlife preservation and recycling with a botanical haven - timely multipurpose wetland ecology at work. Native plants at the top of the system support wildlife habitat for insects, birds, reptiles and small mammals. Plantings transition down the hill from a mixture of native and ornamental plants into a more formalized display pond containing a mixture of common natives and exotic water plants such as water lilies, cannas and floating water hyacinth. The Oak Savannah Wetlands fill twelve acres of land along the Cascade Highway - the final series of pools in which plants continue to draw nutrients from water in the recycling system. AmeriCorps crews are planting Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), Pacific ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*) and other natives in the wetland forested zones. Planting is sponsored by the City of Silverton.



Display ponds in the Water Garden contain native and exotic water plants.
Photo by Frances Burns

The Oregon Garden, in partnership with the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, is developing the Managed Forest from a large grove of un-harvested overgrown commercial Christmas trees already on site. The forest will be a demonstration site for different ages of Douglas fir and commercial forest management practices. A Christmas Tree Garden has been designed for visitors' enjoyment. These features will provide research opportunities for industry as well.

The Silverton Garden . The history, significance and diversity of Willamette Valley crops such as nursery products, grass seed, nuts, hops, grapes, fruits, tea, mint, and berries, will be highlighted in the Silverton Garden. Designed for beauty and utility, plantings in the now brown palette of soil will be colorful and ornamental. Water features will symbolize the local beauty of Silver Creek and Silver Falls. Hop vines on large arbors will frame the garden, while a trellis wall will demonstrate the variety of agriculture in the Willamette Valley. Gardens of fruit vines, ornamental and other grasses, and fruit trees will provide instructional areas. Displays of the valley's landscape, wildlife and agriculture will be featured in the future Silverton Garden House. The house will host harvest festivals and demonstrations on the preparation of agricultural products.

The Home Demonstration Garden

near the Pavilion will change frequently as it demonstrates design, technology, and plant science to visitors. Seven businesses are demonstrating in this 2000 preview season. Additional plots will be introduced as new participants sign on.

The Entry Garden

Until The Entry Garden is completed, visitors will enter the garden through an orientation area in the J. Frank Schmidt, Jr. Pavilion. When completed, the entry will provide parking, a landscaped entry plaza, facilities for admission, membership information, an informal interpretive/meeting room, visitor services, restrooms, security and general offices. The Lorene Sales Higgins Wing will house a retail garden shop and garden cafe with indoor and terrace seating overlooking the Oregon Garden and the Willamette Valley. Most of the individual gardens will be fully planted and dedicated during the "Preview Season 2000."

Educational Opportunities At the Oregon Garden

Some 2,500 kids and adults enjoyed classes at the garden on Earth Day 2000. Jr. Master Gardener Day Camp for kids K-6, offered jointly with the OSU 4-H program, offered topics about the Oregon Garden and its Wonderful World of Plants, Beneficial Insects and How Earthworms Enrich the Soil. Adult classes included Trees and Shrubs for Northwest Gardens; Perennials for Northwest Gardens; Willow Bench, Trellis or Table Making; and Water Gardening in the Northwest. Collaborating with nearby Chemeketa Community College, the Oregon Garden will offer a variety of courses on site, one of which is "Gardening for Wildlife: Using Native Plants in the Landscape." Past inhabitants of the area and its cultural history will be studied at all levels. It is expected that wild-life will move into the garden, providing yet another subject for study and instruction.

Funds are sought for development of a school education program to include school excursions and extracurricular programs geared to give students K-12 the opportunity to learn ecology, forestry, horticulture, and botany in a beautiful hands-on environment.

Volunteers are the heart of the Oregon Garden project - in 1998, they planted 500 Western red cedars in thirty minutes. In March of this year, volunteers completed the understory of the Conifer Garden in five hours, planting hundreds of plants, pulling weeds and bark dusting the entire area. Some 170 volunteers form an "inner core" of intensively trained volunteers who "talk the walk" on the Garden, but are first aid trained and are well versed on where guests may find necessities, niceties, gas and meals in Silverton.

The Oregon Garden is designed to appeal to people of all ages and is readily accessible to the disabled. With sufficient notice and upon request, the Garden will provide specialized tours. For \$1 fare, two 10-passenger electric trams donated by Portland General Electric transport guests on 15-minute tours along the system of paths throughout the Garden. Guided walking tours are available for an even closer look. A tour of the Oregon Garden is tentatively planned for American Rhododendron Society members during the 2001 ARS Convention, to be held in Eugene, Oregon.

The Oregon Garden is located at 879 W. Main Street, Silverton, OR (40 miles south of Portland; 15 miles northeast of Salem; a 15-minute drive east of Interstate 5.)

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the Oregon Garden Foundation for information used in this article.

* In the U.S., Oregon's nursery industry ranks second only to Florida.

Frances Burns is a member of the Eugene Chapter.

Contact the American Rhododendron Society

Contact

Send questions or comments to Scholarly Communication.

