

Beauty exists at Hancock Agricultural Research Station

By Deb Sadowski

Ever since the book “The Secret Garden” was written in 1910 by Frances Hodgson Burnett, both young and old alike have longed to have his or her own secret garden or a place like it. A garden that you can feel is your own, that has nooks and crannies of color and light everywhere; a garden that grows plants that thrive where they live.

Well between Hancock and Coloma, such a place exists and it is called the A.R. Albert and Viletta Hawley-Albert Horticultural Garden.

As you wander through the various flower gardens your senses are treated not only to the sight of beautiful flowers but also the smell of flowers in bloom. To those of us who are more tactile, you can feel the leaves and stems or even check out the feel of the soil. Each bed has a theme with flowers and plants that are conducive to this growing zone.

“We are Zone B. We have sandy soil in this area not clay soil like most of the state. It makes a huge difference in what plants grow here,” explained Master Gardner Javier Rincon.

On Aug. 4, the Hancock Agricultural Research Station held its annual Twilight Tour at the A.R. Albert and Viletta Hawley-Albert Horticultural Garden. It is a five-acre garden that has been gracing the border of the research station since 1991.

Thanks to the generosity of William and Doris (Albert) Willis, who established an endowment fund in 1997, this show garden is open daily for the public

Viletta Hawley-Albert Horticultural Garden continues to show with many of the members of the master gardeners working hard to keep it flourishing.

“We come and work in the garden because we love to do it. We come once a week and work for three to four hours,” said Master Gardner June Olson. “Sure, it helps us get our hours to maintain our Master Gardner status but I always have those hours in by the end of January; we do it because we love to do it.”

Master Gardner President Peggy Morgan added, “We are very committed to these gardens. We want these gardens to always be here for the public to love and enjoy.”

Hancock Volunteer Garden Director Nancy Gilberts Keegan believes the gardens are teaching gardeners and providing visitors an education on what grows best in the sandy soil. “They are gardens that show what grows best in this area. We would never be able to maintain this garden without the help of the Master Gardeners,” said Keegan.

At the end of the year, the local master gardeners also help split the plants and gather seeds to help continue to spread of growth in the garden for the following year. Keegan explained without the help of local vendors, including Miller’s Farm Market and Jack Buchanan giving plants to the garden at wholesale, the garden could not be what it is today.

The Hancock Agricultural Research Station also hosts an annual plant sale to help fund the gardens and keep them going.

“With all the budget cuts with the UW we are pretty much on our own,” said Keegan. “We also try to come up with cost saving ideas for our local flower gardeners, like the DIY trellis. We are very fortunate to have our go to guy for all our carpentry projects, Steve Grimmenga.”

To help maintain the garden it takes at least nine master gardeners, explained Jan Dukelow, Nancy’s right hand grounds keeper. “We send out an email each week of what we need to accomplish and the Waushara County Master Gardeners always seem to know what to do to get it done,” she said.

In 2016, it will be the centennial for the Hancock Agricultural Research Station and a celebration will be held throughout the year celebrating the 100th anniversary.

“The station has a lot of vital components that contribute to the sustainability of local vegetables and plants,” said Research Manager Felix Navarro



During the Hancock Agricultural Research Station Twilight Tour and Open House William and Doris Willis enjoy the flower gardens. The Willis’ left an endowment to help fund the gardens, A.R. Albert and Viletta Hawley Abbott Gardens, which were named after Doris’ father and mother. Her father was superintendent from 1922-47.



Master Gardeners Mary Zwicky and Patricia Bartsch spoke to visitors about many of the plants on the Twilight Tour and how they responded to the sandy soil.

to enjoy. The garden carries the name of A.R. Albert (Doris’s father), who served as the superintendent of the Hancock Agricultural Research Station from 1922 to 1947.

“We have a variety of flower beds,” said Master Gardner Jeannie Loberg. “There is something for everyone, from butterfly gardens, bulb gardens, shade gardens and even raised bed gardens that help people who can no longer kneel or have other physical ailments but still want to maintain a garden.”

The commitment to the A.R. Albert and

PhD. “The beauty of the gardens is that it changes every year. Just like a regular flower garden it has its problems; this year it was some troublesome hostas.”

While attending the Twilight Tour held each year, visitors are able to walk through the gardens and receive an explanation for practically any plant.

Not only are the gardens a sight to see, they also can give one hope that they to can grow something with help from a group of people who can show visitors how to grow hardy plants.

While attending the Twilight Tour and Hancock Agricultural Research Station Open House, Master Gardeners Kathy and Javier Rincon expressed their enjoyment in sharing the knowledge of the plants.

On the tour, Kathy explained the “Obedient Plant.” She showed visitors that by simply pushing the plant the way you choose, it would stay facing that way. The Rincons also take care of the city hall gardens in Wautoma.

The A.R. Albert and Viletta Hawley-Albert Horticultural Garden can be enjoyed year around. It is one of Hancock Agricultural Research Station’s most visible faces to thousands of people who are impressed by the view this garden offers.

This garden is a tribute to the work of the many people who have contributed their efforts to it. A large number of volunteer Master Gardeners from Waushara as well as neighboring counties have given their love and passion for plants in the form of long hours of work.

The Hancock Agricultural Research Station and A.R. Albert and Viletta Hawley-Albert Horticultural Garden are located at N3909 County Road V, Hancock. For more information, visit <http://hancock.ars.wisc.edu>.



Jeannie Loberg and June Olson, both Master Gardeners, explained their section; the bulb gardens at the Hancock Research Station Twilight Tour on Tuesday, Aug. 4.



Rubekia or Black Eyed Susan are a popular wild flower in the area.