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# Mountain Garden Club

By Ellin Booras,  
photography by John Bruni & DD Warren

## APPRECIATION FOR ANNUAL VALLEY BEAUTIFICATION

Whether you are a resident or a visitor to the Mt. Washington Valley in the spring, summer, or fall, you have surely enjoyed the natural beauty of the mountains, rivers, and lakes. It is also highly likely you have appreciated the enhanced beauty provided through multiple avenues by the Mountain Garden Club (MGC). Now in its 46th year, the Mountain Garden Club embraces the opportunity to its 18 member towns. The mission of MGC is dedication to promoting horticultur-

and maintaining sites unique to each setting. There are currently 15 sites located throughout Bartlett, Jackson, North Conway, Freedom, and Conway.

Perhaps one of the most endearing tales that tells the story of the beautification sites is that of Elise Edgerton, the long-time and much beloved force behind the legendary garden islands in Conway. Elise begins her 27th year as coordinator of the beautiful gardens that welcome travelers to the Valley from May extending into the first frost in

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al education, civic beautification, and conservation through volunteering and friendship in the Valley.

Nowhere are its efforts more visible than through the Valley Beautification Sites (VBS). The VBS chairperson, Wendy McVey, brings crews together as the snow melts and the days grow longer. Each spring, over 78 members begin the process of cleaning out flowerbeds, preparing the soil for planting, setting up irrigation plans, designing, planting,

the fall. In the many years since Elise has provided the leadership, talent, and dedication to this site, she has navigated the challenges and opportunities associated with construction, reconfiguration of Route 16, the intensity of summer traffic and its associated heat, as well as changing membership in her steady crew of hardy helpers.

Each spring, Elise comes up with a new and different design for the gardens. She plots it out on



graph paper and begins the process of choosing flowers best suited to the unique growing conditions that define the traffic islands. She meticulously charts out the distances between plants—taking into consideration, each plant’s optimal growing conditions, including sun exposure. In planning her gardens and visiting nurseries to select over 200 plants, Elise anticipates how the gardens will look from the perspective of a driver and passenger. A self-confessed “stickler for detail,” Elise recalls with humor the day when a motorist preparing to take the left across from the gas station, good naturedly called out, “Hey, those flowers are a little off over there.” Such commentary is rare, as Elise is a perfectionist and has trained her crew accordingly. Elise considers her role as that of an architect of a public garden, and with that in mind adheres to the principles of a superbly organized display of beauty! When asked who expressed the most consistent support and praise, she eagerly responded, “The truck drivers.”

Elise recalled fond memories of truck drivers stopping and thanking her and her team, relaying how good they felt when they got to enjoy the beauty of the flowers. Over time, it was the truck drivers who became Elise’s guardian angels. Elise recalled when the project was relatively new, truck drivers communicated through radios. Many a



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Another annual event involves planting the gardens at Story Land. Now in its seventh year, under the leadership of chairpersons DD Warren and John Bruni, the MGC team arrives at Story Land for three days in early June, during which time they clear out existing flower beds, prepare the soil, and plant the 2019 gardens.

day, the first driver to spot Elise and her team would relay the message to all the drivers behind him, alerting them to watch out for the safety of the ladies. In addition to her beloved truck driver tales, Elise shared many stories of drivers weary from their respective commutes calling out word of thanks and praise. Over the past several decades, arriving at the islands has become a landmark for gauging time and distance to arrive at homes and businesses, while serving as a gateway to all the Valley has to offer. Elise is quick to recognize the town of Conway for its continual support, including providing orange safety cones, help with hose connections, and an annual monetary donation.

She prides herself in never repeating a garden design over the 27 years, as she is always looking for different colors and ways to create different patterns. Elise and her team change the flowers from summer to fall, factoring in rain, sun, and impact of construction. She keeps careful notes and copies of her graph paper charts of each year. Elise is very grateful to her work team, noting that her steady workforce of nine to 11 would welcome new faces.

Interestingly, at the new-member tea for Mountain Garden Club held on April 29, those new to the club were asked what attracted them to MGC. To the

person, they replied that they were intrigued by all the Valley beautification efforts; many wondered how they could help the ladies toiling in the traffic islands in Conway.

When asked what sustains her in this considerable commitment to the project, Elise is quick to reply that it is the reaction and affirmation expressed by hundreds of people each year whose time waiting for the traffic light to change transforms from restlessness to reward as they call out words of appreciation to the garden ladies. With a hint of nostalgia and a tone of gracious humility, Elise described how folks in the Valley have come to recognize her and to associate her with her masterful work in the gardens. People approach her in the grocery store and at community events and take time to express their thanks—sometimes sharing personal stories about how the gardens serve as a beacon ushering in a sense of peace. Elise defined her goal as bringing joy to others. There are few people who have walked, ridden a bike, or traveled in a car past these beautiful gardens who would not agree that Elise and her team make a special and meaningful difference each and every day.

In addition to the Valley beautification sites, the Mountain Garden Club proudly presents Art in Bloom



each year. Chairperson Betsey Harding provided the following background and history. In 2005, members Cal Minton, Nancy Lundquist, and Carol White teamed up to start a new event highlighting the confluence of art and flower arranging, emulating that model featured by the Boston Museum of Art. In the Valley, Art in Bloom occurred in several areas of North Conway before the coordinating team decided to make it a walking tour of floral interpretation of art in the village of Jackson in 2011. Since that time, Art in Bloom has been presented each year late in June or early July in Jackson. In 2018, 334 people toured 40 exhibits in nine venues throughout the village. This event is designed as a non-competitive event. Displays are not judged. The event is free and open to the public. This year, Art in Bloom is scheduled for June 29, 2019 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. At 11:30 a.m., Carrie Scribner, owner of the Dutch Bloemen Winkel florist shop in Jackson will offer tips and demonstrate her special techniques in floral arranging. Art in Bloom is considered the MGC's gift to the Valley. This year, there are six sites, including Jackson Public Library, RiverWood Inn, Whitney Community Center, Jackson Historical Society, the Old Library, and the Wentworth Hotel.

Entering its second year is yet another example of community enhancement. The second DD Warren WOW Garden will be installed at the Gibson Center. Last year's inaugural WOW garden was planted at the North Conway Community Center. The goal of the WOW garden is to provide an instant splash of color and beauty to a deserving non-profit agency or organiza-

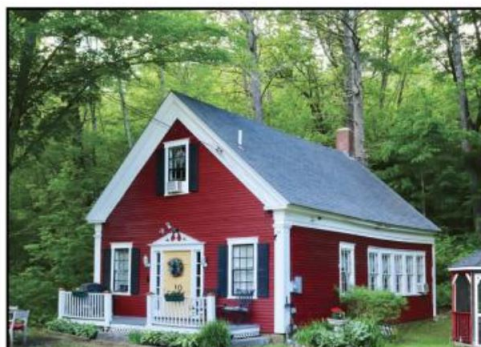
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## DEB'S DEER-RESISTANT GARDENING TIPS

Deb's popular monthly gardening tips are posted on the MGC website as well. They are widely read and highly valued. The May tips focused on deer-resistant plants. The following is an excerpt:

I am here today to offer 4 more wonderful suggestions of spring and summer bloomers, hardy in our plant zone 4, that are again "deer resistant," and therefore can be long-term beautiful additions to our gardens.

First, consider the easy-to-grow **yarrow (Achillea)**. There are many species and hybrids; most grow 2-3 feet tall and bloom prolifically in summer. Yarrows are very tolerant to poor soil and drought; they attract butterflies and divide and grow easily. Gleaming yellow "Coronation Gold" is a common favorite, but many new colors of yarrow are pink, deep strawberry red, or bi-color. All match up well with catmint, bee balm, or lavender.

**Anise hyssop (Agastache Foeniculum)** needs a sunny, well-drained soil situation, but are quite drought tolerant. Hummingbirds and butterflies absolutely love these long-blooming perennials. It tends to re-seed prolifically, so be prepared for it to spread. Its lavender blooms are lovely and last most of the summer. It matches well with ornamental grasses and Russian sage.

**Bee balm (Monarda)** loves lots of sun. Be sure to give it lots of space because it spreads. Bees and butterflies and hummingbirds love this plant. Because it spreads via its underground root system, even if deer do chew it down to the ground, it will grow back. Bee balm matches well with catmint and goldenrod.

Finally, **gay feather (Liatris)** is a hearty plant requiring lots of sun and well-drained soil. It is a pretty plant of tall purple spires; however, it also comes in white. Hummingbirds and butterflies love this plant and deer may graze on it occasionally as they pass through—but the well-established Liatris plant will easily survive a chance encounter and come back even stronger. Liatris matches well with Alliums and colorful yarrow.



tion throughout the Valley. Once the site is selected, members of the garden club will design, clear, and plant annuals. The responsibility for ongoing caring for the garden is that of the receiving organization. This young initiative has been warmly received by organizations throughout the Valley.

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time they clear out existing flower beds, prepare the soil, and plant the 2019 gardens. The Story Land project is a collaborative effort with MGC and Story Land. As you might imagine, it has been very well received by staff and visitors.

Beyond community beautification, MGC is deeply committed to a host of environmental projects. The goal of the Environmental Conservation committee is to assist other non-profit organizations with projects that will enhance the appearance of their respective outdoor spaces. Recent projects include the creation of a rain garden at Children's Unlimited in Conway, the enhancement of the new entrance to the Conway Humane Society shelter, and the creation of a pollinator garden at Kennett High School. MGC has either funded projects or applied for grants to assist with funding. Some projects evolve from organizations just looking to the MGC for advice and/or expertise. Others grow from members' affiliations with other non-profits. Contact Ginny Kanzler, chairperson of the Environmental/Conservation Committee if you are a non-profit organization looking for help with your outdoor space.

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through clicking the appropriate link on the website. This section of the website is authored by Deb Carney, lifelong gardener and landscape artist. Deb serves as chairperson of the Horticulture Committee. Last fall, Deb posted her Top Ten Tasks for gardeners putting the gardens to rest for the winter. Deb's popular monthly gardening tips are highly valued. The May tips focused on deer-resistant plants. Deb provides helpful suggestions for gardeners new to the area, recommending they may wish to get their soil tested to evaluate current status of their lawns and gardens. She cites the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service as the best source of information in New Hampshire. The extension has 14 locations throughout NH. They provide soil analysis and fertilizer recommendation to farmers, homeowners, and researchers. Questions can be addressed over the phone or through email at [soil.testing@UNH.edu](mailto:soil.testing@UNH.edu) Soil test fees are nominal, are available online, and are dependent upon the type of testing.

The Mountain Garden Club takes pride in serving the Mt. Washington Valley through its many activities and volunteer projects. Holding true to its four core values of conservation, environmental/horticultural education, Valley beautification, and friendship, MGC encourages new members to join. All are welcome to help! Who knows, maybe you will become one of the much-appreciated workers who derive great satisfaction from Valley beautification and receive smiles and waves of thanks as folks drive by.

Additional information about the club and its many activities and services can be found at [www.mountaingardenclub.org](http://www.mountaingardenclub.org).



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