

The Garden Club of Amherst Celebrates 100 years of Growing

The Eighteenth Century Garden

The Simeon Strong House on Amity Street, next to the Jones Library, is the home of the Amherst Historical Society. The society planted an old-fashioned garden to the east of the house in 1918 as a memorial to Anson D. Morse, a society board member. Maybelle Churchill, a founding member of the Garden Club of Amherst, oversaw the design, installation, and maintenance. In 1947 she left \$1,000 to the Historical Society for the upkeep of the garden and members voted to use the money to establish and care for an authentic 18th century garden. Between 1956 and 1959, Lyle L. Blundell, landscape architecture professor at Massachusetts Agricultural College (now the University of Massachusetts) led a group from the Garden Club and the Historical Society in planning a manor-style garden at the Strong House. Every effort was made to use only plants authentic to the period around 1750 when the Strong House was built.

Once the garden was finished in 1959, the Garden Club agreed to take charge of its maintenance. Plant sale proceeds that year were earmarked for the 18th century garden and portions of the sale proceeds in subsequent years have been allocated for its upkeep. Over the years Carol Cornish, Hope Davis, Elaine Barker and others have been in charge of the garden. A workbee is held every May to clean up the garden and plant appropriate annuals. The club then hires a professional to maintain the garden for the season.



Located to the east of the historic 1700s Strong House Museum and behind the 1927 Jones Public Library, this garden is a flowering oasis in the very heart of Amherst. The Garden Club of Amherst plants and maintains this delightful space for everyone to enjoy. Visitors may become acquainted with authentic colonial plant material and 1700s garden design, get ideas for their own historic house garden, or think about which plant names have been in New England for three centuries.

Pre-Revolutionary Gardens

The two basic types of pre-Revolutionary gardens planted in New England, depending on the needs and wealth of the owners, were the *cottage garden* and the *manor garden*.

Cottage gardens, modeled after the English style and found in more rural agricultural towns, were laid out between functional walls and informal paths, placed to allow for easy maintenance and harvesting. The walls offered protection from harsh weather and kept out some animals. They contained practical vegetables, herbs, and useful flowers, growing neatly and informally side by side with little actual design. They gradually evolved into kitchen gardens.

Manor gardens, also copied from England, were planted by more prosperous people. Though more formal, they were informally planted. They were often sited on the east or west side of houses, as the south side might be too hot and harsh and the north not sunny enough. They often had a low central axis path of gravel, sod, or cobblestones, as well as secondary paths. Flower beds were often edged with low clipped hedges of boxwood, ribbon grass, moss pinks, lavender, santolina, or germander.

Focal points at either end of the central axis might be an arbor, summer house, sundial, statue, fence, or even a scenic vista. Frequently the manor garden was enclosed by a tall hedge or fence and placed close to the house so that it might be enjoyed, smelled, and somewhat protected. Beds were sometimes dedicated specifically to flowers, or a flower and herb mix. Useful vegetables might be included or grown on a separate bed. The early manor garden was as complex, ornate, and large as the botanical interests, knowledge, or income of the owners. New England manor gardens were seldom as extensive as some of the gardens of the plantation South due to the climate and the scarcity of labor.

After the American Revolution

The manor garden evolved into the *parlor garden*, devoted entirely to flowers. Parlor gardens were usually as wide as the house and about two-thirds as long, were fenced, and had a walk from the parlor door to the garden gate. The garden became a status symbol, in fact, it was a smaller manor garden. The remainder of the grounds maintained a more naturalistic design in the style of Capability Brown, the very influential English landscape architect of the Federal period.

18th Century Garden History

The Amherst Historical Society and the DAR had been meeting at the Strong House since the 1890s. Sarah Emerson and then her daughters owned it, and in 1916 left the house and gardens to the historical society. Soon after, Mrs. Mabel Loomis Todd, the main founder of the historical society, began a correspondence with Maybelle Churchill, head of the society's grounds committee. They planned an old-fashioned garden as a memorial to fellow board member Anson D. Morse, a history professor at Amherst College. Mrs. Morse's generous donation allowed planting of the 18th century garden in 1918 with a Morse Memorial sundial as its focal point. Mrs. Churchill, a charter member of the historical society, guided the work. She was also the head of the Garden Section of the Amherst Woman's Club, and had spectacular gardens behind her home on Spring Street (now the Five Colleges, Inc.).

Mrs. Churchill and her committee watched over the 18th century garden for many years, weeding, maintaining, and replanting annually as needed. She reported faithfully to the historical society at its annual meeting every January. In the early 1940s, Mrs. Churchill and Mrs. Ella Pray, both 1915 members of the garden club, became interested in really replanting the old Strong House garden. Along with several other members they formed the 18th Century Garden Committee of the Garden Club of Amherst, an ongoing committee that still gardens plants, combats weeds, and replants where needed each spring, and provides funds for maintenance.

In 1947, Maybelle Churchill bequeathed the then large sum of \$1,000 to the historical society for the upkeep of the garden, and at their annual meeting members voted to use the money to establish and care for an authentic 18th century garden at the Strong House.

In 1951 the historical society's garden club committee, under the leadership of chairman Mrs. Marion Thompson, worked to develop a well-researched 18th century design. From 1953 until 1956 members of both the historical society and the Garden Club of Amherst worked together under the inspired leadership of Lyle L. Blundell, Horticultural Chairman of the Historical Society, who drew up a plan for a manor garden on the east side of the Strong House. Blundell had two redwood benches built for the northern edge of the garden, memorials to Ella Pray, near the Anson Morse Sundial. At the opposite end of the garden a single redwood garden seat was installed, a memorial to benefactor Maybelle Churchill. All three benches were carved by Amherst College retired botany professor, Orton Clark with a line chosen by Dorothy Galpean from a poem. At the 1956 annual meeting Blundell reported that the "new old garden was nearly completed."

It took until 1959 to finally plant the garden to everyone's delight. On May 21, 1961, Lyle Blundell announced that when the stonework around the sundial was completed, all the work on the garden would be at last finished. In September of 1961 the final stone was laid in place.

The Garden Club Involvement

In 1959 the Historical Society asked the Garden Club of Amherst to manage the 18th Century Garden as their own project. The Club agreed to do so for a five year trial period with funding for plant purchases and hiring any help coming from proceeds of the annual plant sale. The trial period has now lasted for more than 55 years!



Left and above: the garden today;

inset: 1977;

below, top row: 1962; 1963;

(row 2) 1963 Hemerocallis; 1966;

(row 3) 1968; storm damage 1969;

(row 4) storm damage 1969;

1974 Hostas;

(bottom row) 1974; 1985

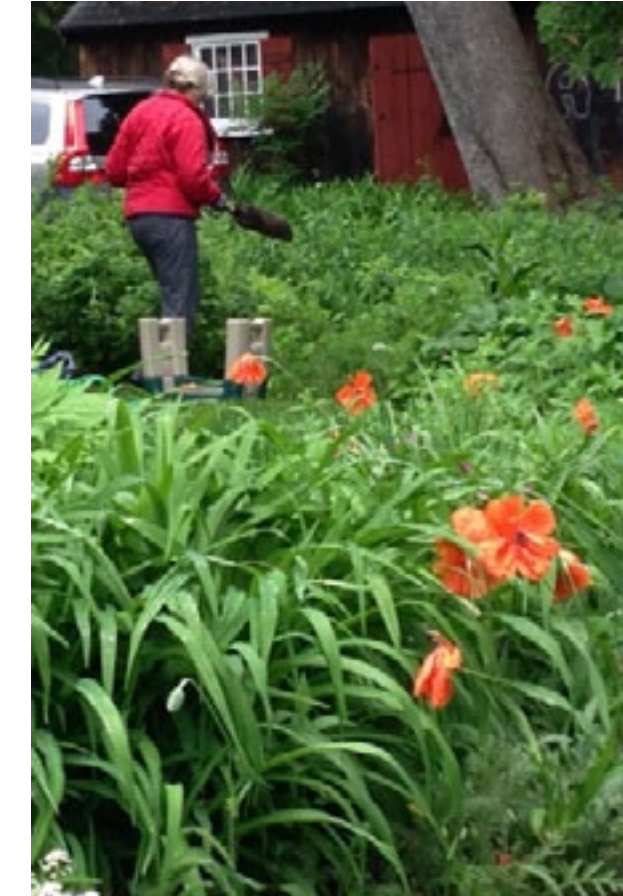
center panel: 1963 beehive;

garden brochure



The following is a list of plant material found in the eighteenth century garden. During some seasons material may be absent due to loss or unavailability

SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME
Achillea millefolium	Yarrow
Achillea ptarmica	Sneezeweed
Acemium rapellus	Muskshood
Aldemilla mollis	Lady's mantle
Alcea rosea	Hollyhock
Amaranthus caudatus	Love lies bleeding
Amaranthus tricolor	Joseph's coat
Angelica archangelica	Angelica
Antirrhinum majus	Snapdragon
Aquilegia canadensis	American columbine
Aquilegia vulgaris	European columbine
Arenaria submontana	Southwestern
Arenaria vulgaris	Mugwort
Aeclepis tuberosa	Butterfly weed
Rapista australis	False indigo
Bacopa sempervirens	English box
Calendula officinalis	Pet marigold
Campanula persicifolia	Peachleaf bell flower
Chelone glabra	Turtlehead
Chrysanthemum maximum	Shasta daisy
Chrysanthemum morifolium	Florist chrysanthemum
Chrysanthemum parthenium	Feverfew
Cimicifuga racemosa	Bugbane
Clematis paniculata	Sweet autumn clematis
Clematis sp.	Clematis
Coronilla majalis	Lily of the valley
Coreopsis lanceolata	Ticksand coreopsis
Coreopsis verticillata	Threadleaf coreopsis
Delphinium elatum	Candle larkspur
Dianthus plumarius	Grass pink
Dictamnus alba	Gas plant
Digitalis purpurea	Common foxglove
Echinacea purpurea	Purple coneflower
Echinops retro	Small globe flower
Eryngium maritimum	Sea holly
Filipendula hesperifolia	Dropwort
Gomphrena globosa	Globe amaranth
Gypsophila paniculata	Baby's breath
Helianthus autumnale	Common sneezeweed
Hemerocallis fulva	Tammy day lily
Hosta sp.	Plantain lily
Hyssopus officinalis	Hyssop
Iberis sempervirens	Candytuft
Ilex glabra	Hollyberry
Iris germanica	German iris
Iris pumila	Dwarf iris
Iris sibirica	Siberian iris
Kalmia latifolia	Mountain laurel
Lilium tigrinum	Tiger lily
Lupinus perennis	Lupine
Malva sp.	Apple
Mirabilis dichotoma	Four o'clocks
Monarda didyma	Oswego tea
Myosotis sylvatica	Forget me not
Narcissus sp.	Daffodil
Nicotiana glauca	Flowering tobacco
Nigella damascena	Nigella or fennel flower
Oenothera fruticosa	Sundrops
Oenothera lutea	Star of Bethlehem
Paeonia officinalis	Common peony
Papaver orientale	Oriental poppy
Phlox coronaria	Mock orange
Phlox divaricata	Wild blue phlox
Phlox paniculata	Summer phlox
Physostegia virginiana	Fake dragon head
Platycodon grandiflorum	Balloon flower
Polemonium reptans	Greek valerian
Primula polyantha	Fritillary
Pulsatilla angustifolia	Lungwort
Rosa sp.	Old fashion climbing rose
Rubus sp.	Black eyed susan
Sanguisorba officinalis	Burnet
Tagetes patula	French marigold
Tanacetum vulgare	Curly tansy
Thalictrum flavum	Meadow rue
Thymus occidentalis	Abbot's thyme
Tridacena virginiana	Spiderwort
Trollius europaeus	European globe flower
Topsoolum majus	Nasturtium
Triga Canadensis	Common hennock
Valeriana officinalis	Garden heliotrope
Veronica longifolia	Clump speed well



Work bees at the garden: (top) yoga break, 1966; (row 2) 1969, 1974 lunch after working; (row 3) 1974; 1975; (row 4) 1985; the garden after 2015 workbee; (bottom) 2015 workers

