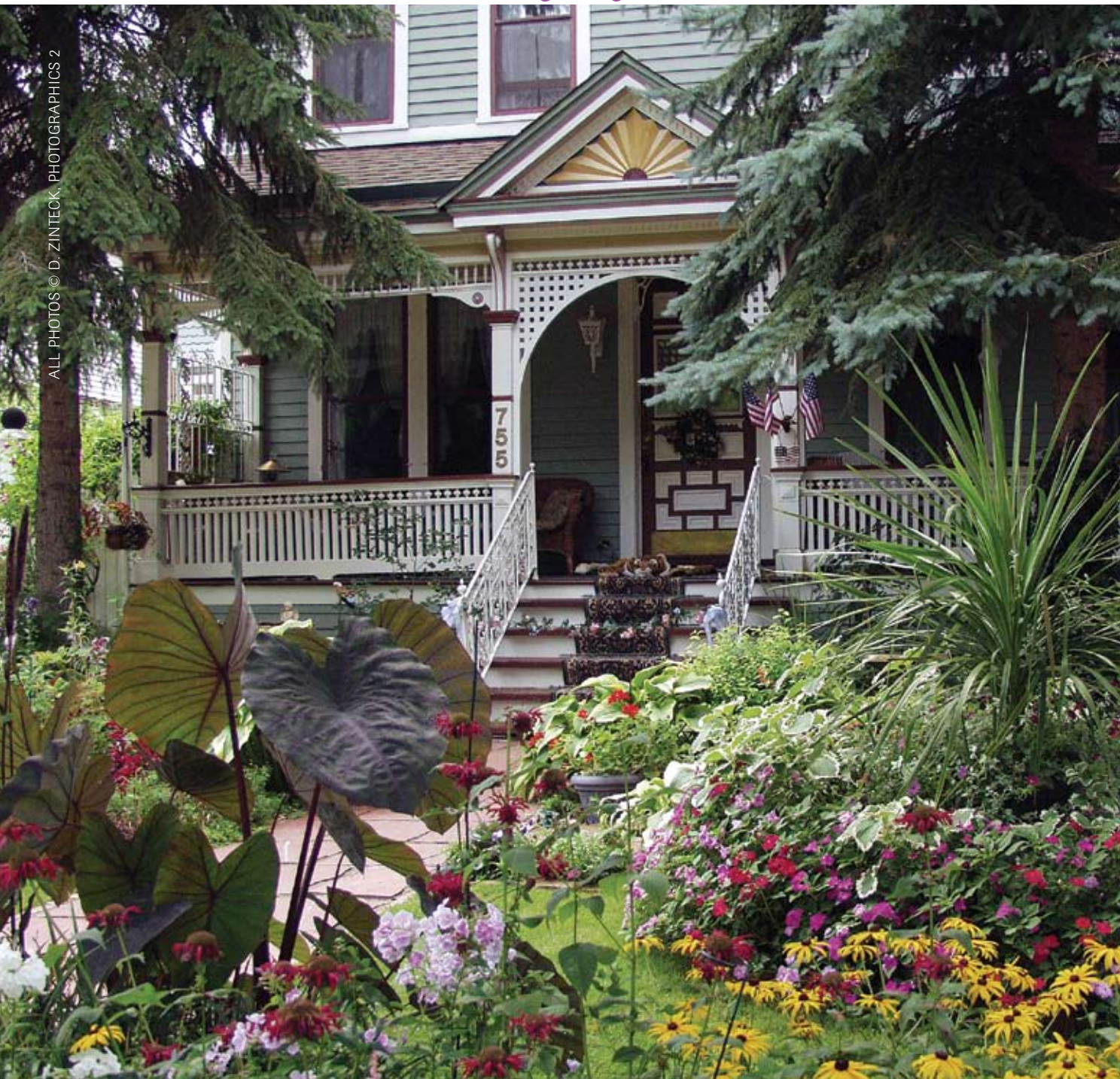


# WALK THIS WAY

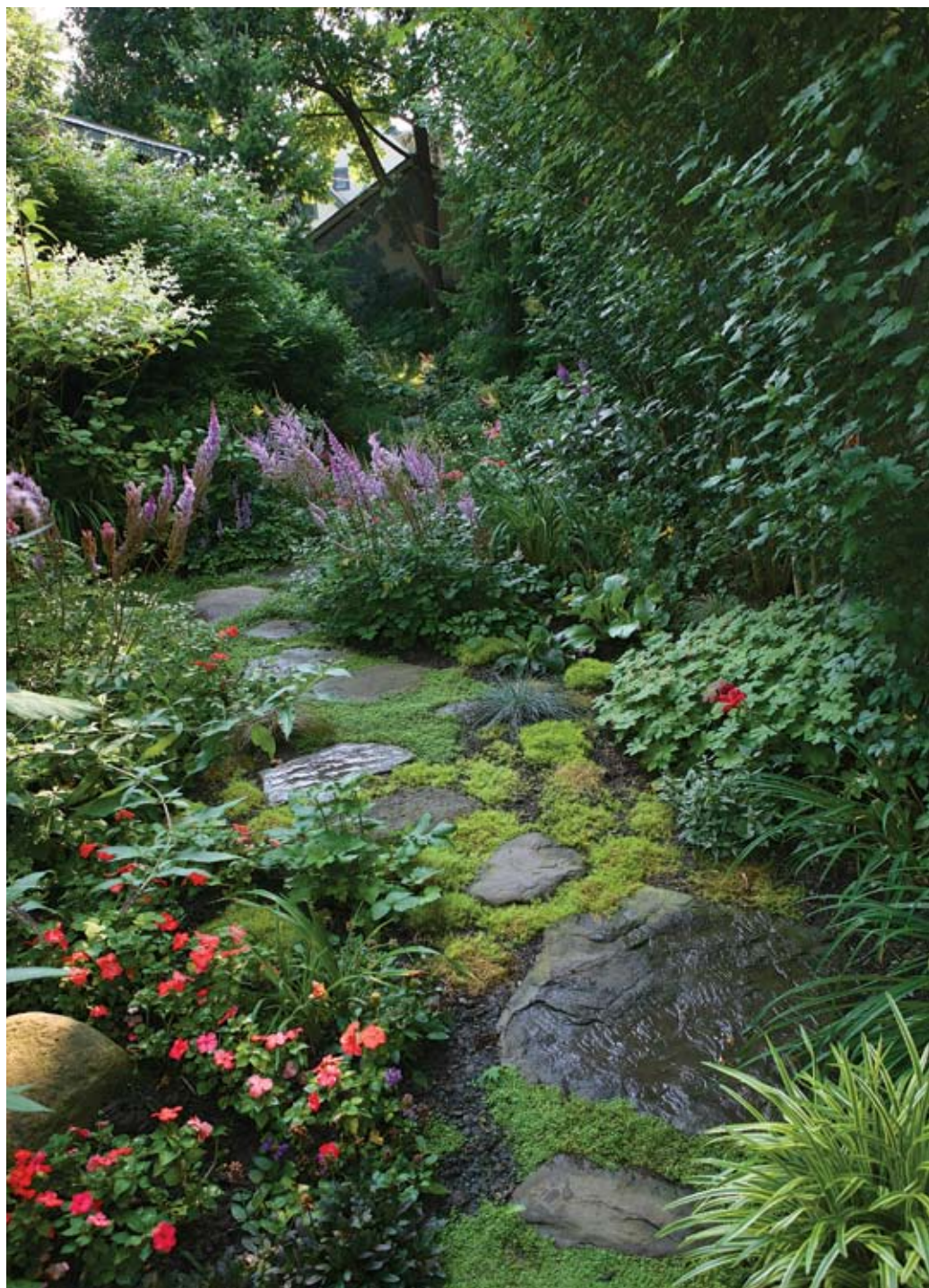


# Hometown pride blooms at Garden Walk Buffalo

by ELIZABETH LICATA ~ *photography by* DON ZINTECK

Below left: Jennifer and Jim Guercio's lavish front and back gardens have been a highlight of Garden Walk for more than 10 years.

Below right: A shady path winds through David Bender's back garden, ending in a quiet pond and seating area.



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ow did a former industrial center with a reputation for snow and chicken wings become the home of America's largest free garden tour? It started in 1995 with two Buffalo, New York, gardeners.

Marvin Lunenfeld and his wife, Gail McCarthy, attended Chicago's Sheffield Garden Walk ([sheffieldfestivals.org](http://sheffieldfestivals.org)) in the summer of 1993. They admired how the free tour of 140 private gardens was self-guided, took place in an industrial area and seemed utterly free of the white-glove exclusivity that pervades many

tours of private gardens. The couple brought the idea back to their block club on Buffalo's West Side, in an area now called the Elmwood Village. Their neighbors decided that the concept would work equally well in Buffalo, and, after some door-to-door networking (and some free iris bulbs as gentle bribes), they gathered willing gardeners and created a basic framework. The first Garden Walk in Buffalo took place July 15 and 16, 1995. It was intended to show outsiders how green and beautiful an inner-city neighborhood could be, and to set an example so that others

**At right: Former workmen's cottages on Little Summer Street have small plots that use every bit of planting space for annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees. Below: Ellie Dorritie's front garden beautifully nullifies the need to mow.**





## FRIENDLY KEEPING UP WITH THE JONSES SPIRIT

in the neighborhood might improve their properties.

In early interviews with the *Buffalo News*, Lunenfeld and McCarthy made it clear that Garden Walk was about community, not competition. Lunenfeld, a retired history professor, stated, “We don’t see it as an elite ideal. There are no prizes for best garden. It’s meant to spread.” McCarthy, a highly regarded ceramicist, said, “You almost can’t find a better way to relate to human beings than through gardens.”

The number of gardens in the event grew quickly, from 19 in 1995 to 40 in 1996 to more than 200 in

2003. Separate committees arose to handle the different Garden Walk tasks, such as managing the immense database of potential attendees, creating the four-color map and manning the headquarters during the weekend, when thousands of walkers converge to pick up maps, water, T-shirts and tips on the best gardens. Last summer’s Garden Walk included 341 gardens.

### CARRYING ON THE TRADITION

Longtime Garden Walk gardener and garden blogger Jim Charlier is the current president of the organization, which is now a 501(c)(3)



# YOU CAN'T FIND A BETTER WAY TO RELATE TO HUMAN BEINGS THAN THROUGH GARDENS

not-for-profit entity. “We’re expecting 50,000 visitors in 2010,” says Charlier, who designed the distinctive GW logo. “We’re also teaming with other Buffalo cultural and nonprofit garden groups to put on the National Buffalo Garden Festival. Every day of the summer there will be something gardening-related going on (from exhibitions to seminars to concerts). It’ll be the biggest garden party in the country.”

Garden Walk’s increasing popularity throughout the U.S.—The-Atlantic.com columnist Andrew Sprung described the event as “mind-blowing” in a post—indicate that the event has gone beyond its original aim of neighborhood boosting to city boosting, supplying great publicity for a struggling urban center known more for snowfall than for lily pads.

But even more importantly, Garden Walk has challenged its attendees’ conceptions of what a garden can be. By far the most common comment, heard over and over, to the Garden Walk gardeners has been, “I didn’t know you could have this in the city!” Attendees learn that one can have front gardens full of flowers or even vegetables rather than lawns, that a small urban space can pack big horticultural interest and that freewheeling designs that morph slowly (and affordably) over time can be just as effective as expensive landscaping do-overs.

Garden Walk includes cottage gardens, water gardens, Japanese gardens, rock gardens, classic English-style borders and, increasingly, vegetable plots, rain gardens and even green roofs. The neighborhoods of Garden Walk contain the entire range of 19th-century domestic architecture, including workman’s cottage, Italianate, Queen Anne, Stick, Second Empire and Colonial Revival, as well as some contemporary structures.

## MUCH TO SEE IN LITTLE TIME

Garden Walk has become a yearly pilgrimage for garden tourists

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throughout the United States and Canada. A typical attendee won't come close to visiting all the properties on the tour. He or she will try to hit areas where the gardens are densely concentrated, such as the charming cottages of Little Summer or the bright-painted clapboard Victorians of Lancaster and Norwood. One sure way to tell if attendees are from outside of Buffalo is by their looks of grim determination, as they check off streets on their maps, trying to get it all in before 4 p.m. on Sunday. Locals are much more likely to take a relaxed attitude, catching

up with streets they haven't visited for a while; there is always something new. In fact, Garden Walk has engendered a friendly keeping-up-with-the Joneses spirit. If one gardener on a block adds a water feature, chances are very good a few of his neighbors will be digging ponds or constructing fountains either that season or the following year, although now the water features are as likely to be ornamental rain barrels and chains.

Neighbor by neighbor, the gardeners of Garden Walk continue wiping the grit off Buffalo's image.

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**ELIZABETH LICATA** is a freelance garden writer, editor and a member of the Garden Walk Buffalo steering committee.

## IF YOU GO

### **Garden Walk Buffalo**

July 24-25, 2010

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

both days

[gardenwalkbuffalo.com](http://gardenwalkbuffalo.com)

[buffalocvb.org](http://buffalocvb.org)

**Must-sees** | Little Summer cottages, Allentown courtyards, Delaware Park Rose Garden, hidden-away side streets such as Brantford, Granger, and Argyle Park

**At peak** | Oriental lilies, monarda, rudbeckia, clematis, roses, hydrangea, colocasia, hemerocallis, Kousa dogwood, zinnia, dicentra, cleome, Japanese anemone, and many more.