

8-25-2012

Shh....it's a Secret! EIU Greenhouse & Garden

Journal Gazette-Times Courier

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/eiu_news

Recommended Citation

Journal Gazette-Times Courier, "Shh....it's a Secret! EIU Greenhouse & Garden" (2012). *EIU in the News*. 4.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/eiu_news/4

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in EIU in the News by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

Showcase



COME BACK MONDAY
Video game review: Death takes a holiday in 'Darksiders II'

Shhh... it's a 'Secret'

Garden is an ever-changing oasis on EIU campus

BY SARAH MILLER
JG-TC Staff Writer

Like most gardeners, Steven Malehorn is passionate about the plot of land he tends.

"I think this garden is probably the best garden on campus, if not in Charleston," said Malehorn, the greenhouse manager at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston.

The garden he refers to is known as the Secret Garden, due partially to its hidden location between the Thut Greenhouse and Life Science building. The title also draws from the book and movie of the same name, Malehorn said.

"The garden is hidden by the building. You don't realize its here until you're in the garden and realize you're in the garden," Malehorn said.

With over 441 species, not counting weeds, the garden flows from Seventh Street east of the Thut Greenhouse, along the fence to the south and wraps around to the north side of the Life Science building.

Depending on where one sits, stands or walks, each area of the garden is different due to the amount of sun it receives, the types of plants, the landscaping or other variables Malehorn has added during his nine years as caretaker.

"Every year I do a little bit more. I change something and add something different," he said.

A portion of the garden is filled with native shade plants, and divided by a pathway into a "woody" garden and native specimen garden, Malehorn explained.

The woody part of the garden is made to look reminiscent of what visitors would see in a wooded area in east central Illinois. Malehorn does selective weeding to keep the area from becoming overrun by invasive species and

removes different species each year to make one more dominant.

The "civilized woodland garden" is filled with specimen plants, nestled in a dry, shaded area of the garden under two towering Dawn Redwood trees.

Directly below the redwoods, the ground is covered with hostas, the only plant Malehorn has been able to grow as the trees absorb a large amount of water, he said.

"I spent eight years trying to grow other plants," he said.

The Dawn Redwood was thought to be extinct, but was found growing in China in the 1940s and can now be found throughout the world.

"It's a living fossil," he said.

As it is Malehorn's intention for the garden to always be in a state of change, in 2010, he added raised beds made of native limestone, hand-picked from the Charleston Stone Quarry. A path, made of bricks that Malehorn recycled when the old brick wall was removed, winds through the native shade portion of the garden.

The constant changes and use and reuse of materials and plants within the garden allow Malehorn to incorporate his artistic skills into the landscape.

For the past few years, he has been working on a bachelor's degree in art, and prior to working at EIU, was in engineering for 20 years.

"It takes an artistic skill to put a 1950s Buick Roadmaster in your garden," he said as he explained his take on a car's grill fashioned from pieces of concrete that surrounds a bed of native grasses.

South of the greenhouse and north of the fence along the main sidewalk, the garden transitions to full sun. In the herb garden, another new addition is one of Malehorn's favorite areas.



Ken Trevarthan/Staff photographer

Thut Greenhouse manager Steven Malehorn waters a shaded section of the Secret Garden. He has spent three to four hours a day watering this summer due to the drought.

Last year, Malehorn planted a chamomile pathway, an idea derived from the popularity on chamomile lawns in Europe and now the U.S. The path can handle moderate traffic and omits a soft scent of chamomile when walked on.

The garden has not always been as lush, nor intricate. When Malehorn took over the responsibility of overseeing the garden in 2003, it was clear it needed to be updated, he said.

"It was just sitting here languishing. I wanted to turn it into something interesting as

a specimen garden. I took it artsy. It is a work of art more than landscaping. It's evolved over the years and will continue to change," Malehorn said.

Today, the Secret Garden, greenhouse and greenhouse courtyard cover 4,000 square feet and are home to approximately 2,000 species — a far cry from the small study garden that consisted of grass and a path of broken concrete near the greenhouse when it was built in 1962, Malehorn said.

In the 1970s, more plants

were added and it became known as the Azalea Garden, as members of the campus community began donating azaleas for the garden, Malehorn said.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, additional landscaping was added including shrubs, hostas, daylilies, rhododendrons and a few trees, he said.

The garden certainly takes more time and effort these days; Malehorn has watered for three to four hours every day this summer due to the drought and even installed

soaker hoses in the full sun garden for the first time.

"It helps to enjoy pulling weeds," he said. "It's been water, weed, water, weed to keep up with it."

But the even without drought conditions, Malehorn commitment to the garden is the key to its success.

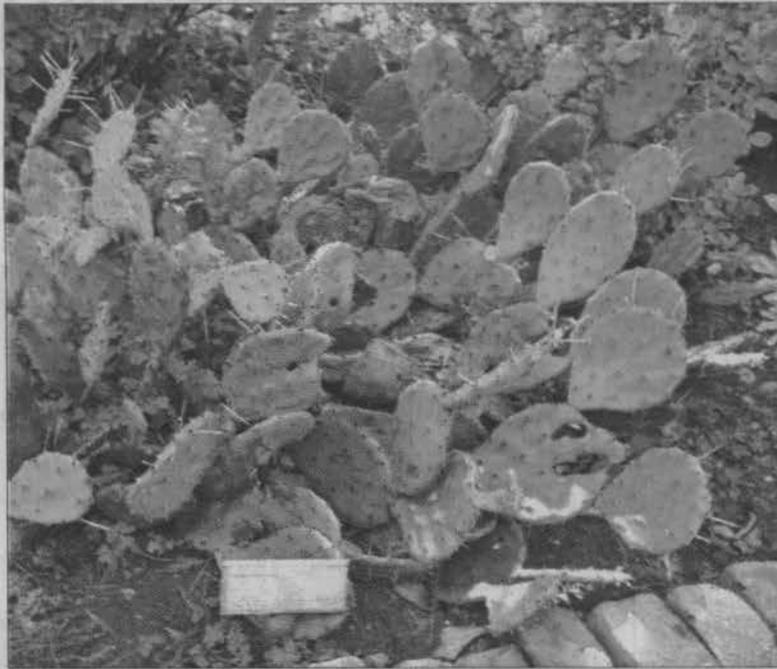
"I work seven days a week, 365 days a year. I've been here every single day for 14 years, literally. I'm committed," he said with grin.

Contact Miller at 238-6847 or smiller@jg-tc.com.



Ken Trevarthan/
Staff photographer

Above: View of the
Secret Garden next to
Thut Greenhouse at
Eastern Illinois
University in Charleston.



Above: Prickly pear cactus, an Illinois native, is one of the plants living in the Secret Garden.

At right: The curved edging of recycled bricks winds through the Secret Garden. The bricks were once part of a wall in the garden.