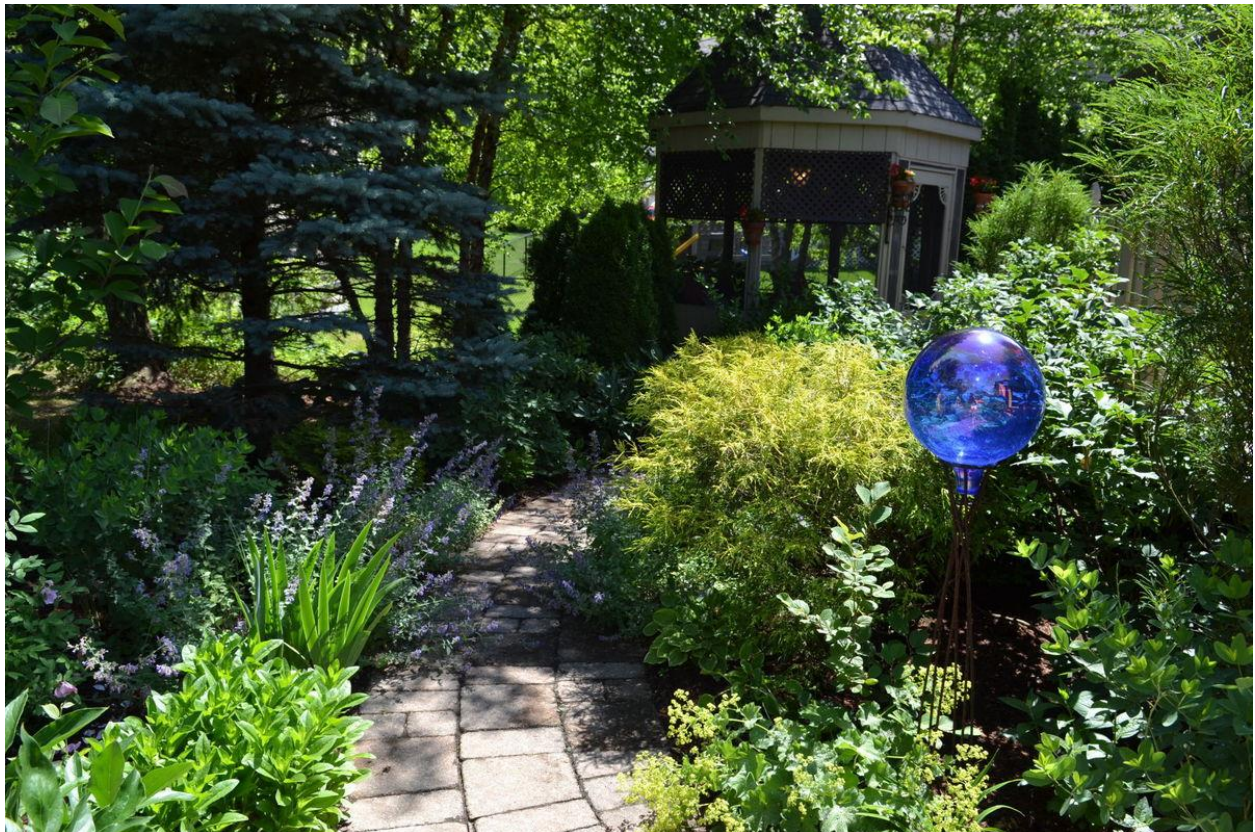


# Visitors to expect floral variety at 14th annual Porter County Garden Walk

Samantha J. Gross, Times Correspondent



On a hot day in June, Bill and Christine Pierce pick weeds, tend to their lawn and inspect the dozens of plants that make up their charming Valparaiso garden. The 14th year of Northwest Indiana's premier garden event is soon to be in bloom, and flower experts of Porter County — the Pierce's included — are working hard to prepare the long-awaited floral site.

The Pierces' garden is one of the four homes to be showcased at the Porter County Garden Walk on July 9, when their creative arrangement will be visited by nature lovers of all ages and backgrounds.

The walk, hosted by Porter County Master Gardeners Association and Purdue Extension Porter County, will feature sites ranging from English shade gardens with Boston-inspired window boxes to native plants in serene, wooded habitats.

This year's sites are located in and around Valparaiso and Chesterton. In addition to the four private gardens, Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve in Chesterton will be included as a featured location on the walk.

Co-chairwomen Gloria Potter and Barb Kunshek are leading the walk for the first time, and said more goes into the planning process than one may see on the surface.

"We have a big supporting cast," Potter said. "We have publicity and promotion, and then certain people who do different things ... so we coordinate it, but as far as the behind-the-scenes thing, there are people that do all of that. Thank heavens!"

Potter added that each garden features a variety of unique plants, each of which will be explained by Porter County Master Gardeners, volunteer docents and homeowners. Since each garden is in a different location and tended to by a different family, the techniques tend to vary.

"I tend to break all the rules," Christine Pierce said. "For me, it's trial and error. If it doesn't do right or I don't like it, it comes out. I'm not fussy... I plant close together because I want to be in the garden."

Pierce noted that some must-sees in her garden are her blue-belled clematis, disease and deer-resistant rugosa roses and bronze pygmy false cypress. The garden also features May-blooming tree peonies and an enormous, shady American beech tree, which is a prominent mark of an established area. Pierce said that after she and her husband moved from Hobart around 10 years ago, they worked for three more years on the backyard garden.

"When my husband and I moved in here, it was total weeds. It was a mess ... you couldn't see over our deck," she said. "I had mulberry trees popping out everywhere. I don't have anything original to the house when we moved in. Everything went."

In addition to admiring the now-established gardens like the Pierces', visitors can learn about growing their own native plants in a home landscape, draw inspiration from Master Gardeners about landscape ideas and even learn how to grow organic vegetables. Some homes will feature a watercolor artist or violinist as entertainment, and each garden will also offer door prize drawing.

Advance tickets are \$6 and go on sale today. Tickets on the day of the walk are \$8. For more information, visit [pcgarden.info](http://pcgarden.info).