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Garden of paradise

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Lorraine and Robb Roberts



Plant Paradise Country Gardens is not your ordinary garden centre. It is a 24-acre property containing display gardens within managed forest. There are long, curving perennial borders, a wildflower meadow, woodland trails, a large pond garden, vegetable beds, cold frames and nursery beds where plants grow sturdy before being offered for sale. Everything is grown organically.

Plant Paradise was created and is managed by the husband and wife team, Lorraine and Robb Roberts. Lorraine wrote the perennial guide that was published in the spring issue of *Caledon Living*.

This is not the garden centre to buy flats of pansies and impatiens. Nor will you find ready-made hanging baskets and planters. They specialize in hardy perennials, native plants, wildflowers, ornamental grasses and hostas. Unique varieties are available, including a prickly pear native cactus that blooms in July, yet "The rare and unique things sell out early in the season," warns Lorraine.

The display gardens grow the kind of plants that are for sale, and everything sold from here is intended to grow well. "We have chosen perennials to provide continuous bloom and texture all season long in our Zone 5 climate," states their Web site at www.plantparadise.ca.

Robb and Lorraine moved in with Lorraine's parents seven years ago, when there was only grass, the house and trees, and began creating perennial beds. The natural soil on the property is clay. From experience, they can recommend the method of laying newspaper on the grass first, then adding thick compost on top, adding more compost every year.

"We got four to five dump trucks of Caledon compost to create the beds," says Lorraine. They even frequently amend the soil throughout the growing season with compost and organic composted manure.

Their shift into the nursery business began out of necessity. They found they had too many failures from plants they bought from nurseries. The little plants would not thrive after planting. Because of the size of the beds they needed to fill, they considered starting their own seeds.

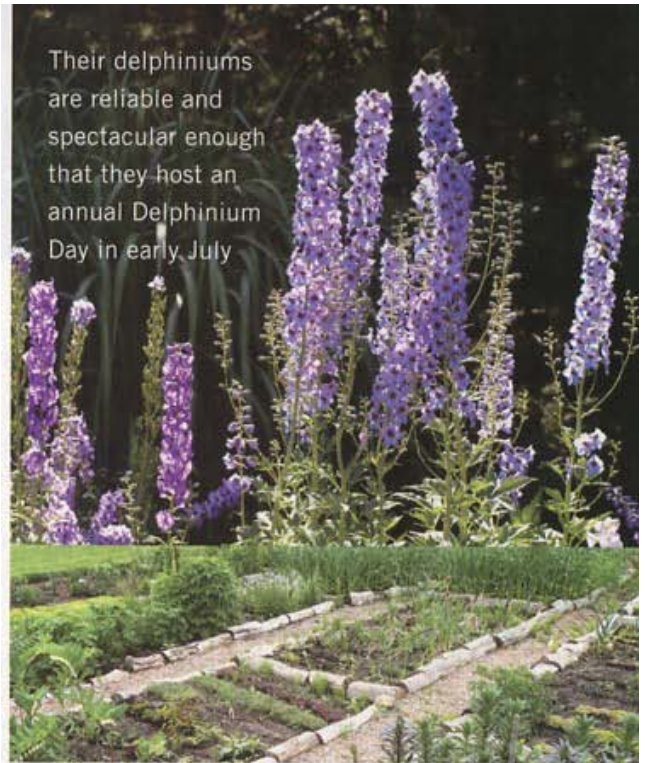
"We would grow thousands of perennials from seed because of the cost," says Lorraine.

"And the success rate," adds Robb. They found that the plants they nurtured themselves did better.

"We need strong, healthy plants to uptake the water," explains Lorraine. They take divisions and seeds from their plants and raise them to large size before selling.

"Plant Paradise Country Gardens sells only the healthiest and most viable plants," states their Web site. "We guarantee that all species sold are true to name. Before and after making your purchase, we are here to help you choose the appropriate plants for your growing conditions." They have been in the nursery business only two years, but already have loyal customers.

"We sell all of the perennials that we grow until the end of October," adds Lorraine. "*Delphinium elatum* is best planted from April to June so that is



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the only time we sell it, or until supplies last. Perennials that are field grown in our nursery beds are ready for planting in April and onwards and do not need any frost protection. You can plant at any time during the growing season."

They claim that the delphiniums they sell will not die out after a few years if properly planted and cared for, but will actually grow strong enough to need dividing.

"When planting delphiniums," Lorraine explains, "it is best to mix well-composted manure into your soil with a sprinkling of bonemeal to help them grow well for many years. They are heavy feeders which means they uptake lots of nutrients from the soil. This may require you to feed your delphiniums organic nutrients each spring to produce tall six-foot bloom spikes. I recommend using the organic product called "Nourish" by Gro-tek. I also recommend buying organic well-composted manure, which can be purchased all season long."

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They also host tours for garden groups. The tour might start with the long, undulating beds near the house, including a stop at a shade garden planted beneath a deck. Along the front of the property, a lush garden bed lines the road, even growing on Town property beyond their property line. They shrug at the thought of the Town one day needing to use the land, saying that they'll just move the plants elsewhere.

The tour might include a visit to the distant pond garden with water lilies. The wildflower meadow is left to self seed



around a stained glass garden feature they made, that glows in the light. A woodland trail is beginning to be lined with hostas and other shade-loving plants to form another demonstration garden. The nursery beds are full of healthy flowers, vegetables and the occasional interloper.

"I'm not a weedophobe," says Lorraine.

Pots of bushy plants are displayed for sale in an open area near some woodland. Also on display are pieces of twig furniture made by an artist from northern Ontario, and rustic chairs and tables made by Robb out of cherry wood complete with its striking bark.

Lorraine also provides landscape design, consultation and installation services. "I design landscapes with the approach of working within the harmony of nature and the environment," she says. "The design is created to provide four-season interest in the garden with an emphasis on continuous bloom. Choosing the right plant for the right place makes all the difference."

"Each client's property and personal tastes are uniquely different," she continues. "The landscape design is based on many factors, primarily on each client's desired results, which are discussed during a personal garden consultation." ■

Some of Lorraine's Gardening Tips

- 1 Don't plant at midday. Plant early in the morning or late in the day.
- 2 When planting, dig the hole two to three times larger than the pot and mix in some composted manure. Fill the hole with water, place the perennial in the hole, fill with water again, then cover with soil and water again to settle the soil.
- 3 Don't water in the sun. You'll burn your plants.
- 4 To control self-seeding flowers, cut them before they go to seed. Fill your house with bouquets!
- 5 For an organic way to prevent such problems as red lily beetle damage and hollyhock rust, treat plants and soil with a solution of neem oil.