

# WILD GARDENS MEMORIES

*Acadia National Park Centennial 2016 Oral History Project*

*The Wild Gardens of Acadia began as a project initiated in the early 1960's by the Bar Harbor Garden Club, spearheaded by garden club members Betty Thorndike, past president of the garden club (1956 – 1959), Janet TenBroeck, and Betty Owens.*

*For the Bar Harbor Garden Club's contribution to the 2016 Centennial Celebration of Acadia National Park, the Garden Club conducted interviews with Club and community members who had been involved in the early development of the Wild Gardens of Acadia.*

Bar Harbor Garden Club

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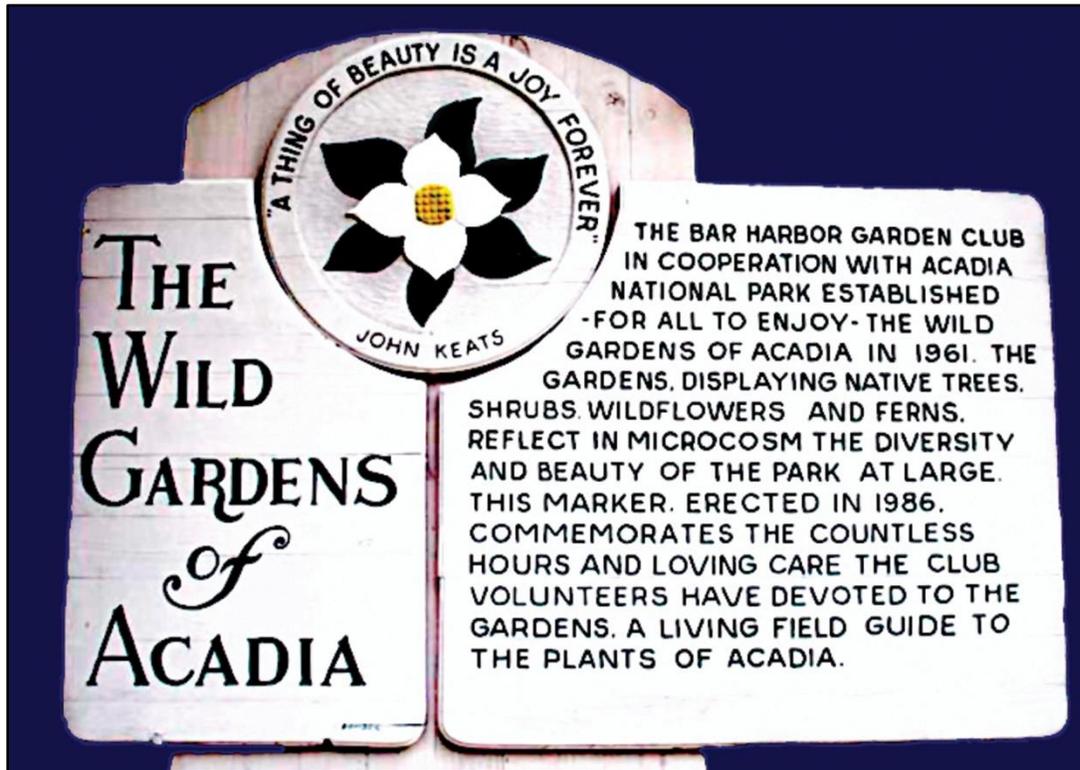
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The Bar Harbor Garden Club is a member of the St. Croix District Garden Clubs, the Garden Club Federation of Maine, the New England Region and the National Garden Clubs, Inc.

The Bar Harbor Garden Club Centennial Project Ad Hoc Committee (Betty Crawford, Barbara Knowles, Karen Kupiec, Andrea Lepcio, Eileen Linnane, Jan McIntyre, Dianne McMullan, Donna Reis, Virginia Ruth and Michaelleen Ward) would like very much to thank the individuals who shared their love and memories of the Wild Gardens of Acadia. We also extend our gratitude to Gary Stellpflug, Marie Yarborough, and Lynne Dominy from Acadia National Park, and Stephanie Clement from Friends of Acadia.

## Introduction



This is a picture of the original sign celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WGA donated to BHGC & ANP by the *Eastern National Parks & Monuments Association*.

George Dorr's vision for the Wild Gardens of Acadia (WGA) is well documented in his writings published as early as 1919. <sup>1</sup> However, it was not until 1938, when William Robinson addressed the Bar Harbor Garden Club (BHGC) about the National Conservation Committee's list of endangered species that a vote was taken by the Club to sponsor a campaign for the protection of wild flowers and shrubs on Mt. Desert Island.

In the area of the present day WGA at Sieur de Monts Spring, a boggy section was tended by Club and local community members interested in preserving native plant habitats and providing education about them.

In 1960, BHGC member Janet TenBroeck sponsored a wild flower propagation competition. Harold Hubler, Acadia National Park (ANP) Superintendent and husband of BHGC member Sally Hubler, became aware of this effort and offered the present tract of ANP land to the BHGC for a native plant gardening project.

On April 13, 1961 Professor Albert Hill presented a lecture on "Conservation of Wild Flowers" to the BHGC and that same Fall the WGA Committee of the BHGC began to develop the current WGA in cooperation with ANP.

Although George Dorr was the ideological founder of the WGA it was the women in the BHGC who brought these gardens to fruition. Indeed, for the past 55 years of its history the WGA have been supported by many volunteers from both the Club and the community. Until 2010, when the Friends of Acadia (FOA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ANP to oversee and support the gardens, the BHGC remained the "parent " organization of record with ANP for the WGA. To this day there is a WGA Committee of the BHGC, the Club gives an annual gift of financial support and BHGC members volunteer their time – to tending these native plant habitats.

The following excerpts from interviews with Club and community members give insight into the early history of the gardens and their volunteers.

<sup>1</sup> **George B. Dorr** "The Sieur de Monts National Monument and the Wild Gardens of Acadia" 1919 a Report from the Journal of the International Garden Club (U. of Maine digital commons @U of ME. Maine History Documents, Special Collections)

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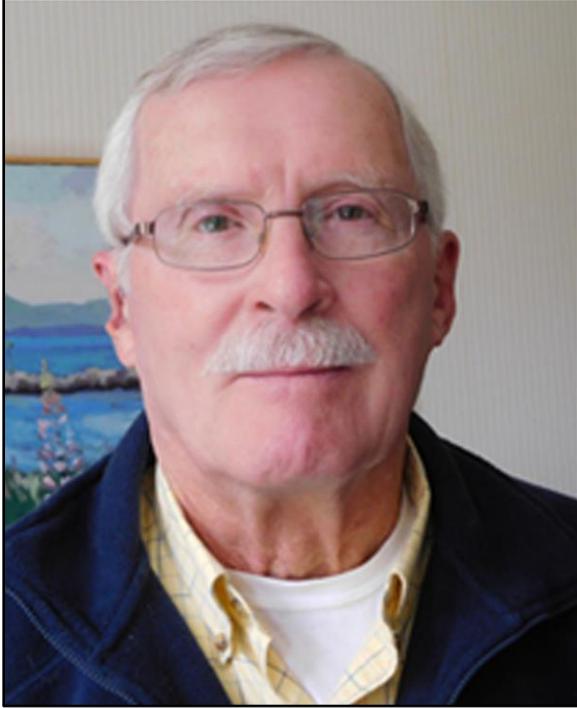
COA Graduate, Playwright and BHGC Member **Andrea Lepcio** offers Wild Gardens Memories. . . . . [Page-12](#)

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According to Bar Harbor native **Sheldon Goldthwait**, son of Ruth Goldthwait, herself a most earnest, dedicated member and later President of the Bar Harbor Garden Club (1964-1967), he was persuaded to work in the "bog" whilst in high school. Mother enlisted him and some of his classmates to clean the fall leaves from the "bog" in the early spring, a wet and chilly annual task coming well before the onset of the later spring black flies and planting season.

Apparently beavers were quite good at damming and flooding the "bog" in winter, so that even the large fishnet brought in from Jonesport to be stretched over the "bog" to catch the fall leaves was but moderately helpful, making the full body activity of Sheldon and his high school friends a requirement.

In trying to place his memorable boyhood task on a timeline, Sheldon opined he graduated from Mt. Desert Island High School in 1956, and after that was probably no longer available for this kind of mother-driven activity. The "bog", the precursor to the now well-planned and planted Wild Gardens of Acadia, was the project of a number of women in the community interested in preserving and displaying native plants.

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**Carolyn Miller** and her husband Keith moved to Bar Harbor when Keith became Superintendent of Acadia National Park in 1971. Carolyn joined the Bar Harbor Garden Club at that time. Carolyn recalls the Wild Gardens of Acadia had been established and were still being developed. She herself was not involved in working in the Gardens, but rather enjoyed the peacefulness of sitting on a bench there early in the mornings, bird watching. She loved the Gardens.

Her husband, as Park Superintendent, worked with Betty Thorndike, Janet TenBroeck and Betty Owens, BHGC members, regarding decisions about the WGA. One concern was standing water in the bog and how to keep it flowing. This was worked out between Park staff and the leaders of the project from the Garden Club.

They were all concerned about the problem of theft of Lady Slippers from the Gardens, and signs in the Gardens. Superintendent Miller assigned people from the Park staff to live in the apartment over the Sieur de Monts building on site for security. Another problem at that time was people coming just to pick the high-bush blueberries, one of the native plants in the Gardens.

Carolyn remembers her husband being appreciative of the work of the BHGC in establishing WGA, and continuing to be involved during his tenure at ANP.

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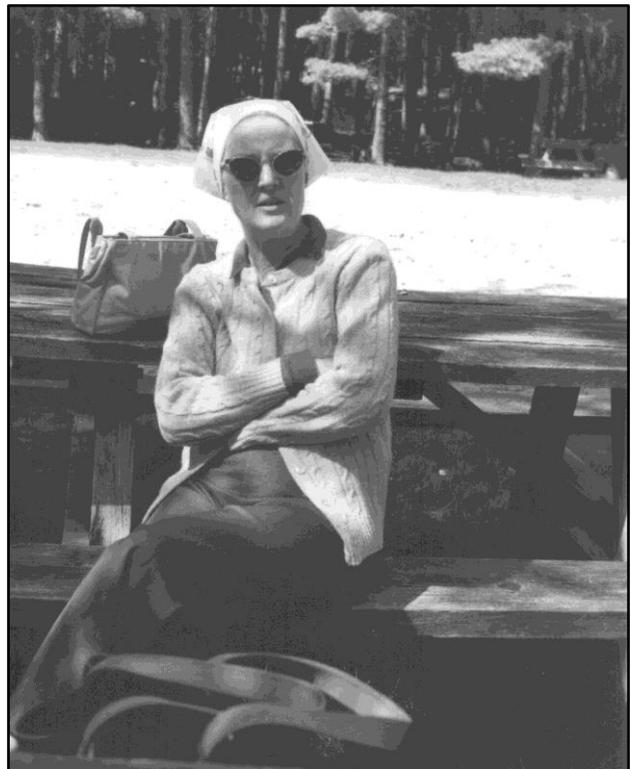
**Wendy Knickerbocker**, Daughter of Julia C. Knickerbocker (1920-2002), recalls:

My mother held a Master's Degree in Zoology from the University of Pennsylvania. Although she was captivated by all of nature, botany held a particular fascination for her, and she found MDI and Acadia to be unbelievable presents.

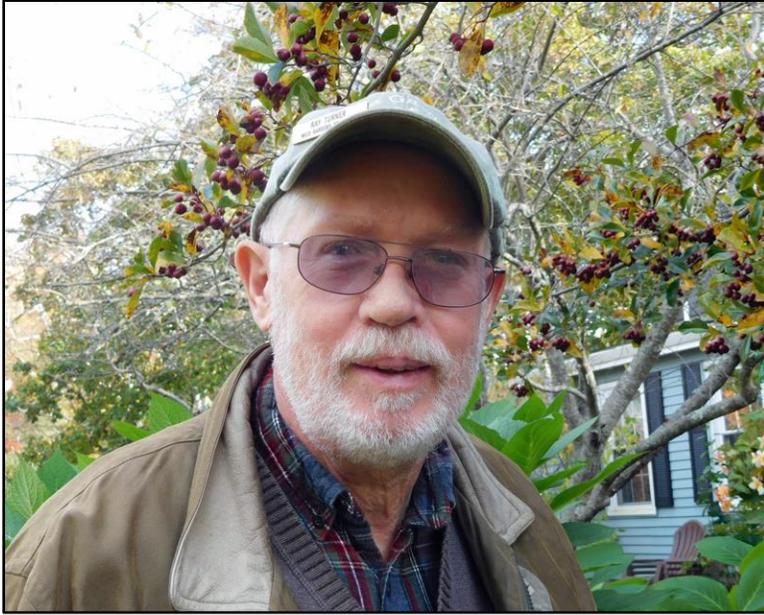
My mother was a volunteer at the Jesup Memorial Library and the MDI Hospital Auxiliary, as well as being a member of the Bar Harbor Garden Club. In all three organizations she worked with Betty Thorndike, and through her, my mother became good friends with Janet TenBroeck. Along with those women, she was an early enthusiast for the creation of the Wild Gardens.

My mother's special projects were plant identification and hand-lettering nameplates with both English and Latin nomenclature. She had a "workroom" on the third floor of our house, and I remember that for a few years there always seemed to be nameplates spread out on her worktable. Some were for newly planted specimens and some needed refurbishing or rewriting.

While my mother was a whiz at most handicrafts, sign-manufacture wasn't one of her skills. Fortunately, it was part of the skillset of Janet TenBroeck's husband Carl. My mother made the nameplates and Carl attached them to wooden stakes to hold them in the ground. Then my mother took the finished products to Sieur de Monts Spring and matched names to plants for the edification of us all. Her nameplates survived Maine's seasons quite well, and as late as the 1990's my husband and I were delighted to find an occasional one still identifying a mature planting.



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**Ray Turner**, retired MDI Hospital Respiratory Therapist and lifelong avid gardener, gives recollections of the developing years of the WGA:

I was only in high school at the time, and my friends and I only played a small role in the change from an overgrown tangle into a finished garden. Most of those folks involved were adults at the time, and most, or all are gone now. I can only relate how I, as a high school student, became involved. From 1962 - 1966, I was

one of three students, the others being Bob Seeley (now deceased), and Ed Kaliss, who assisted Janet TenBroeck (we referred to her as “Dr. TenBroeck” even though she did not have an advanced degree) with the collection of specific plants for the Wild Gardens. Most of the more common plants had already been collected and she wanted to find more uncommon plants, particularly those growing in peat. As you know, this was under the auspices of the Bar Harbor Garden Club.

The TenBroecks were friends and neighbors of the Kaliss’s and Dr. Carl TenBroeck was a fellow Jackson Lab scientist with Dr. Nathan Kaliss (Ed Kaliss's father). Dr. Kaliss told Janet that we three hiked often in the Park and all were very interested in the local flora. She asked if we would be interested in helping her to collect particular plants, and we jumped at the chance! She organized some plant collecting trips, but didn't know who to ask permission for those plants that she wanted.

I told her that my aunt, Dorothy White of Halls Cove, owned many acres of forested land that included a sphagnum bog. I also mentioned my uncle, Brian Maddocks of North Ellsworth, who owned a large tract of forested land. I was sure that some of the plants she wanted could be found there. Also, some other uncommon plants might be discovered.

We wanted to search mostly for bog plants. The Wild Gardens bog area at that time was where the pond is now. It was moved for good reason as it continuously flooded with fresh water. We young fellows were fascinated by insectivorous plants and had a special interest in finding and collecting some. The pitcher plants and sundews were fun, but walking in cotton grass looking for *Arethusa* and *Rose Pogonia* was great fun. We knew to collect only where there were healthy stands left. Sometimes “Dr. TenBroeck” stayed with the car and just let us loose. We were probably quite a handful, not really paying attention to time, and on more than one occasion we were hailed by

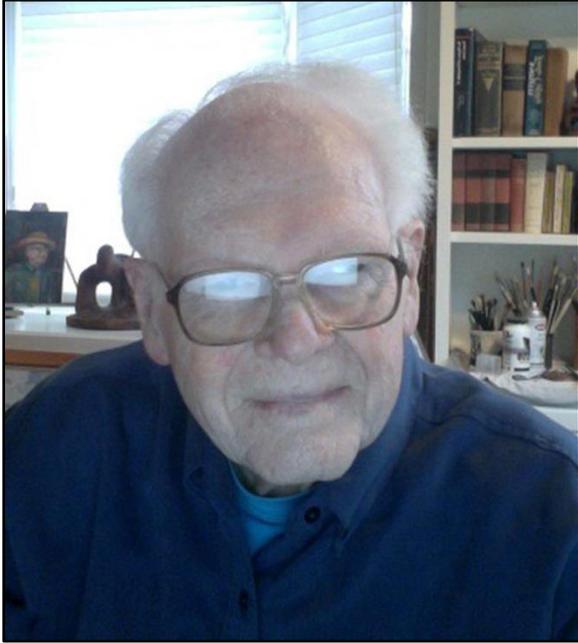
repeated horn blasts from the car. “Dr. TenBroeck” always carried Dr. Wherry's "bible" wherever we explored, and she would be reading it when we finally arrived late back at her car.

In North Ellsworth we discovered a large stand of rattlesnake plantain orchid which we carefully divided. I believe that the progeny of that stock still grow in the coniferous woods site.

We didn't have much contact with other Garden Club members so my memory of names and faces have gone. I do remember helping Mrs. Hodgkins with the cardinal flower in the stream. She was a neighbor of mine and she grew them from seed. Toward the end of our work, the Garden Club had a party at the home of Betty Owens where we were all thanked for our contribution to the WGA.

So there it is, not so much to relate but great memories, and a solid background in my lifetime enjoyment of horticulture.

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Janet TenBroeck’s son-in-law, **Frank Gay**, recalls his mother-in-law fondly. He is a retired Chemist for DuPont, and a History Professor at the University of Delaware.

Janet TenBroeck, Betty Owens and Betty Thorndike were looking for a project while at the Abbe Museum, Sieur de Monts Spring with Superintendent Harold Hubler.

Superintendent Hubler suggested the Wild Gardens. Janet and the Hublers were friends, and Frank also remembers socializing with the Hublers at his mother-in-law’s home as well as at the Superintendent's home. He recalls seeing the three women working together. Betty Owens and Betty Thorndike provided financial support for

the Gardens. The Bar Harbor Garden Club provided a place for the three women to get together.

Remembering the devastation all over the Island a few years after the fire, he recalled it was a "bad scene" with some new growth but still dead trees. The three women's goal was to duplicate native plants in the Botanical Map from the 1890's Botanical Survey in the Wild Gardens.

Frank describes himself a "go-fer". When he and his wife (Janet's daughter) walked through the door to visit three-to-four times a year, he would be handed a list of plants to be retrieved for the Wild Gardens. On one visit, cinquefoil (a native plant) was on the list but no one had been able to locate any locally. Fortunately, the Park Superintendent told them where it could be found and gave Frank authorization to dig it up. As the plant was on top of Sargent Mountain, he was not comfortable retrieving it but proceeded— permission slip in hand— to carry out his mission.

He was more comfortable getting plants from other sources. For instance, he’d gather Canada and Philadelphia lilies and trillium from the railroad right-of-way off-Island on Hancock Point. To get beach pea he traveled to Ellsworth, turned right and proceeded forty miles up the coast to a beach where he had permission to dig. As it needs to have its feet wet, it was planted in the Wild Gardens bog and was still there last time he visited.

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Bar Harbor Garden Club member and past President **Jane Haraden** (1979-1981) returned to MDI in the 1970's. The BHGC had received the National Garden Club award for the WGA in 1975, therefore she remembers the Gardens being well established.

As President of the BHGC, she accepted the Acadia National Park award for the WGA in 1979 from ANP Superintendent Lowell White. In 1980, Jane along with BHGC members Betty Thorndike, Julia Smith, Brenda Les, Muriel Lindquist and Marilyn Forsell (wife of ANP Superintendent Warner Forsell) traveled to Waltham, Massachusetts where Janet TenBroeck was presented the Conservation Medal by the New England Wild Flower Society for the WGA. In October 1989, both Janet TenBroeck and Betty Thorndike were awarded Silver Medals from the

Massachusetts Horticultural Society for the WGA.

Jane relates finding some unusual plants in her woods. She called the WGA and one of the three founders came to look. The plants were determined to be a type of orchid they did not have in the Gardens. Two of the three founders returned and gently dug some up, took local soil, checked the daily sun that reached through the trees and type of trees around the area. They were so pleased to get them. The orchids were replanted at the WGA and Jane hopes they are still there because the next year the deer ate hers.

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COA Graduate, Playwright and BHGC Member **Andrea Lepcio** offers Wild Gardens Memories:

I had the great privilege and joy to be selected as intern to the Wild Gardens in the summer of 1977 (pretty sure). The job was to tend to the gardens. I forget who oriented me, but I believe it was someone either from the Park or the Garden Club. I started my job getting used to walking the garden, looking for changes or problems, identifying sections to weed, looking for places needing more plants and the like. Soon, Janet TenBroeck visited me. I was 19 so she seemed like 100. Well, I just checked and she was about 82. At that young age, I noticed immediately her cane and worried she'd fall. How wrong I was to even wonder. Janet was a force of nature. Her knowledge of the wild plants of Acadia was vast. She had vision, drive and energy. My favorite

thing, quickly, became following her around. And, oh, what adventures we had. She with that cane, poking and pulling at a plant. “Let me get it,” I'd exclaim, with both of us laughing. I learned so much from her.

One day, Janet took a look at a weak spot in the gardens. I'm not remembering exactly what was there before the pond. I do remember there were some orchids that we diligently saved while digging. In any case, Janet was dissatisfied with it and determined we should dig a pond. Armed with shovels and pitchforks and muscle, Bill Bergevin, the other intern, and I set to work. Janet directed the shape and depth, watching out for plants we should save, and making plans for plants we would add. I wish I could remember how long it took. We did do it by hand. I understand the pond was repaired by backhoe a couple of years ago. We did it by hand. It was so gratifying to create an entirely new environment in the Wild Gardens.

Regarding Betty Thorndike, I have many memories of both in the garden and around the college. She would come by, look around, give her thoughts, gently, and encourage us. I remember her less in the muck as Janet, but equally engaged. I want to add that Betty was very good to me as a student. She offered me housing in her Lodge House. She also arranged for me to get grants from Garden Club members for my internship in Congress. Betty was vital to my college education.

I feel so lucky to have spent such quality time with these two forward-thinking, vital women. They were big influences on me in terms of giving back, creating life-giving projects and events, and greeting all with a smile.

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*Walter Norwood*, MDI High School's former science teacher, and caretaker of the properties of several women active in the Wild Gardens of Acadia, reminisced about the early days of the Garden. He remembered Bar Harbor Garden Club members Janet TenBroeck, Elizabeth Gorer, Lois Frazier, Katrina Hummel, Betty Owens, Betty Thorndike, Barbara Cole and Sue Leiter who spearheaded populating the garden with native plants.

Although the Garden was on National Park land, it was the women, not Park Rangers, who laid out its foundation. Erosion was a problem; as a consequence he remembers hauling bales and bales of straw each Fall to be laid down on the paths between the different portions, uplands, lowlands, meadow and swamp to prevent wash outs and also to use as mulch. Sections were laid out for each woman to plant and maintain. The plants themselves were obtained from all over the Island. Walter remembers picking up different types of ferns here or orchids there for the women to plant in this central accessible spot. Here they could all be seen together and used for educating young people of the Island about this unique Island environment. Maintaining the gardens was a family affair; he remembers his son John, now in his 50's, as a 5 year old "helping him out" with the straw bales and plants. Walter credits these BHGC women, most of them now long gone, with the vision and work ethic necessary to bring the Wild Gardens of Acadia to fruition.

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Don't forget to look at the

**ADDENDUM:** [Wild Gardens – Awards Received by the Bar Harbor Garden Club](#)