



GEDDY GARDEN NEWS

*"I have banished all worldly care from my garden;
it is a clean and open spot."*

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(385-433)

Since the tragedies of September 11th, people have been seeking ways to ease their anxieties and restore hope and peace in their lives. Fitness clubs report an increased enrollment in meditation classes. Yoga, an age-old practice, has become extremely popular, as well as aerobics and **pilates** classes. People are seeking ways to cope with the chaos of the world.

In 1874 Frederick Law Olmsted designed the landscape around our Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The design was carefully created to offer comfort and solace to the visitors and to offer a good view of numerous trees, in oaks, crepe myrtle bushes, and rose beds strategically planted to express beauty, strength, and to emphasize the importance of the Capitol building as the focal point. Today the aesthetic beauty of his design is disfigured by concrete barricades, steel barriers, and barbed wire. These are bold reminders of the terrorism of September 11th. Eric Sloan wrote, "a spirit itself is something that doesn't die, and the reverence for the land as an inherent part of man must for our eventual survival continue to be an American heritage."

Since my visit to Bok Gardens in Florida I have become aware of a way of recovery that works for me. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself," but I believe that there are contributing factors that are conducive to helping is obtain that inner peace. One of those factors is our environment. A research study at Rutgers University confirmed that the beauty of flowers reduces stress, uplifts spirits, and eases anxiety and depression. A well-known psychologist, Jeannette Haviland-Jones, reports that, "flowers have strong positive effects on our emotional development."

One way to instill hope in what tomorrow will bring and to recharge your senses is by taking a walk through a peace garden. Any public park or garden can be considered a peace garden if it serves to lighten your heart and spirit.

Mr. Rockefeller, in his preservation of the history of our country, chose to show the spirit of America through the beauty of nature. He did this with the gardens of Colonial Williamsburg. He also contributed financially to the landscaping on the Blue Ridge Parkway, a scenic road that attracts 23 million visitors a year. I'm sure many of those visitors are seeking refuge and escape from the chaos of the cities.

There is an organization established in 1984 called Gardens of Peace. It is a non-profit organization with a goal to create harmony between man and nature. There is one of these gardens located where my daughter lives in Connecticut. It is the Caroline Black Garden of the Connecticut College in New London. It is named for the first chairperson of the Botany Department of the college who suffered an untimely death in 1930. The five-acre garden, located on Route 32, Mohegan Avenue, across from the entrance to the college, serves the public as a place of pleasure and solace and serves the college botany students as a teaching facility. In May, 2001, the garden was officially dedicated as a member of the Garden of Peace Organization. I recommend it if you happen to travel that way.

However, it is not necessary to travel out-of-state to find a peace garden. It need not be officially dedicated to answer your personal needs. We are fortunate to have in our community a garden that can offer you a sanctuary, free your mind of heavy burdens, and become a garden of peace for you. It is Melissa's Meadow. If you are not familiar with it, let me acquaint you with this special place. It is located on the campus of William and Mary, on South Henry Street, at the Tennis Center. The site was originally the old Eastern State Hospital Farm and a picturesque old brick mule barn still stands on the property. It had become an unsightly dumping ground for both the hospital and the college. Volunteers worked to clear the boggy meadows and prepare the soil. One of the very special aspects of this garden is the way it has served to connect different parts of the community. It was developed through the efforts of interested citizens, college students, garden clubs, master gardeners, and the recycling club of William and Mary. The recycling club spread old newspapers that were then covered with mulch. The Virginia Living Museum donated original plants. The College of William and Mary allowed locally collected seeds to be started in flats in their greenhouse facility. Some seeds were donated from North Carolina Botanical Garden. It was a real team effort. It is appropriately designed to suit the former use of this land. A formal garden was not planted there because a wild flower meadow was more reminiscent of the hospital farm that was once there.

In June of 1999 the garden was named and dedicated to Melissa Long Etchberger. Melissa was the daughter of Bob and Cynthia Long and an alumna of William and Mary class of 1984. She was an employee of Colonial Williamsburg. Melissa was actively involved in the early establishment of the garden, keenly interested in environment conservation and recycling. She left this world suddenly and too soon in 1996 and because she was loved by many, the site was named Melissa's Meadow. Bland Freeman inscribed a beautiful stone identifying the garden as such and in the spring there will be new signage sketched by artist Arlene Fabbri, a long-time Colonial Williamsburg employee, identifying some of the numerous wild flowers and grasses found in the meadow.

I invite you to visit Melissa's Meadow in May when the birds will be singing and the bees buzzing about. The red and yellow flowers will energize you and the blues and greens will soothe you. The fragrance of the meadow will let you delight in the wonders of nature and these things will combine to give you peace. Celia Thaxter wrote in the 19th century, "Ever since I could remember anything, flowers have been like dear friends to me, comforters, inspirers, powers to uplift and to cheer."

Janet Guthrie