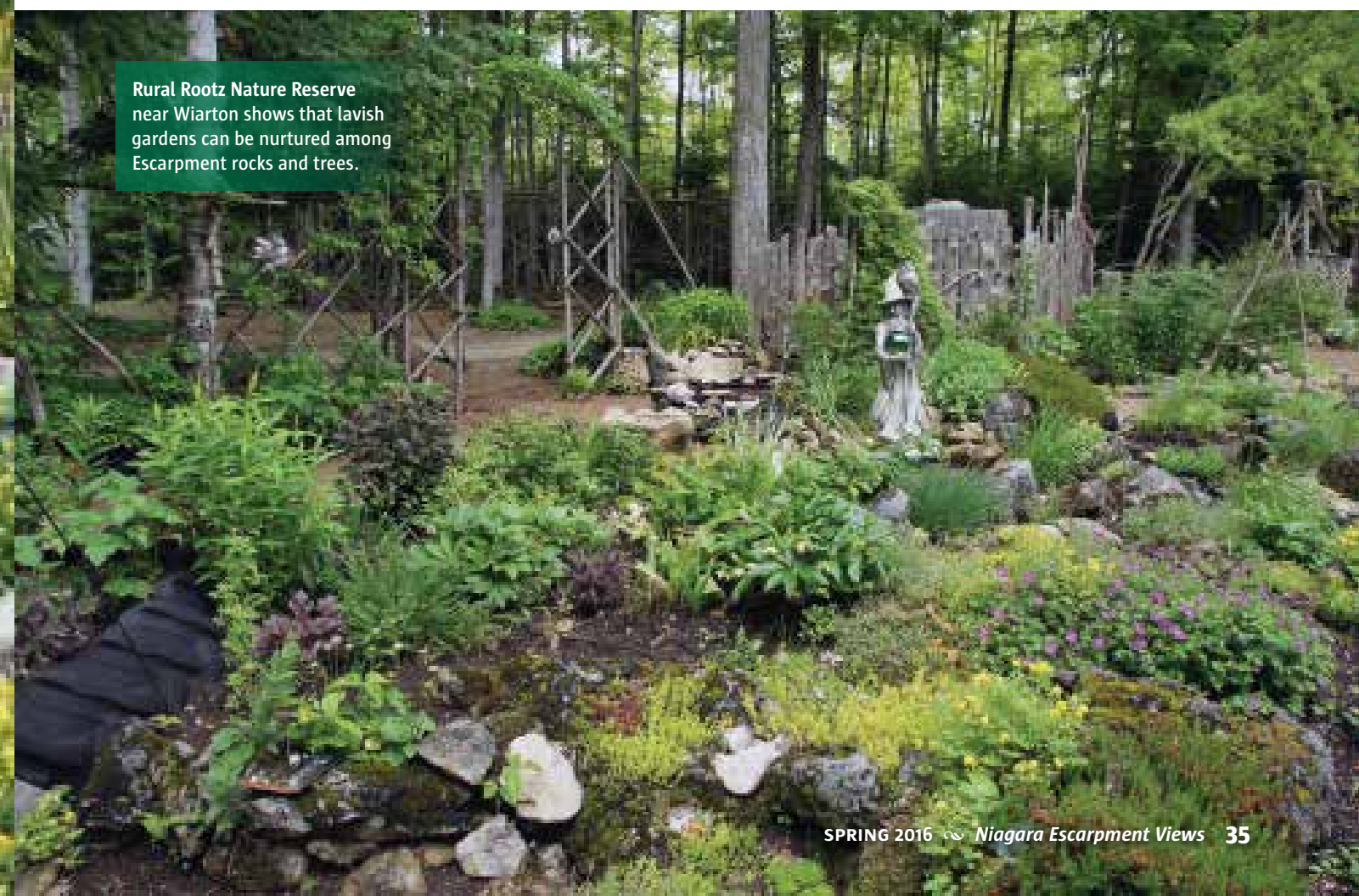


Since 1977, Dawn and Bill Loney have been creating vast art-filled gardens at Keppel Croft, north of Owen Sound.



Earthbound Gardens at the Bruce Peninsula's Red Bay is a vast nursery with demonstration gardens.



Rural Rootz Nature Reserve near Wiarton shows that lavish gardens can be nurtured among Escarpment rocks and trees.

Gardens GREY-BRUCE

BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT • PHOTOS BY MIKE DAVIS

There are 23 gardens that are members of the group Rural Gardens of Grey and Bruce Counties. The three gardens featured here, Earthbound, Keppel Croft and Rural Rootz, are founding members.

To people further south, Grey County and the Bruce Peninsula seem to be a difficult place to garden. Gorgeous gardens are indeed possible here, as proven by Patrick Lima and John Scanlan of Larkwhistle, located near Dyer's Bay in the north part of the peninsula and made famous by their many books. This garden was featured in *Niagara Escarpment Views* in Summer 2013, the last year it was open to the public. Many other people in this area are avid gardeners who have developed inspirational places despite significant challenges. Close to the Niagara Escarpment, the earth can be simply unfriendly.

Keppel Croft Gardens

In 1977 Bill and Dawn Loney bought 76 acres at Big Bay, north of Owen Sound and east of Wiarton, and dreamed of creating a garden. "The land was a farm field," says Bill. "We started with a clean slate."

On their website keppelcroft.com, Dawn notes their predicament: "Little did we know that we would be gardening on a prehistoric beach with a skim of topsoil over three metres of gravel." Despite this, they have four or five acres of front gardens: colourful perennial borders, a rockery, xeriscape garden, zen garden, woodland garden and community vegetable garden.

"We got the horticultural

bug in a bad way," says Bill. "We plant in holes dug in the ground and then use pebbles as mulch around the plants."

Dawn explains more precisely that a hole must be dug in the gravel with a pickaxe. Soil is sieved into a wheelbarrow, then the stones removed. The soil is enriched before being put back in the hole and the plant introduced. Newspaper surrounds the plants and the removed stones are placed on top.

Rural Rootz

Tom and Dee Ashman bought their 100 acres west of Wiarton in 1975. "There was nothing but trees and rocks," says Tom. "We couldn't garden

because there was no soil." Their solution is ingenious.

"We used tires as planters," Tom continues. "We filled them with soil and surrounded the tires with rocks. All the rocks have come from in sight of the house. A pickaxe and backhoe were used to take the rocks out of the ground."

There is now a full sun garden that incorporates a natural outcropping of stone, a full shade garden, and a vegetable garden of raised beds topped with hoops to hold up different kinds of covers as needed, plastic when the beds need protection from the cold, shade cloth against broiling sun, and row covers to protect from insects.

"It's a difficult garden to picture," says Tom. "There is no focal point. It grew organically."

Earthbound Gardens

On the west side of the Bruce Peninsula, at Red Bay, Earthbound Gardens is far

enough from the Niagara Escarpment not to have rock-filled earth. Instead, business partners Judy Larkin, Brenda Sutherland and John Close had a different problem with the five-acre property they bought 20 years ago.

"The soil was depleted of any nutrient value and had very little organic matter in it," they say. "The soil in our main gardens required three to four years of intense additions of leaves, compost and a variety of different types of manures to

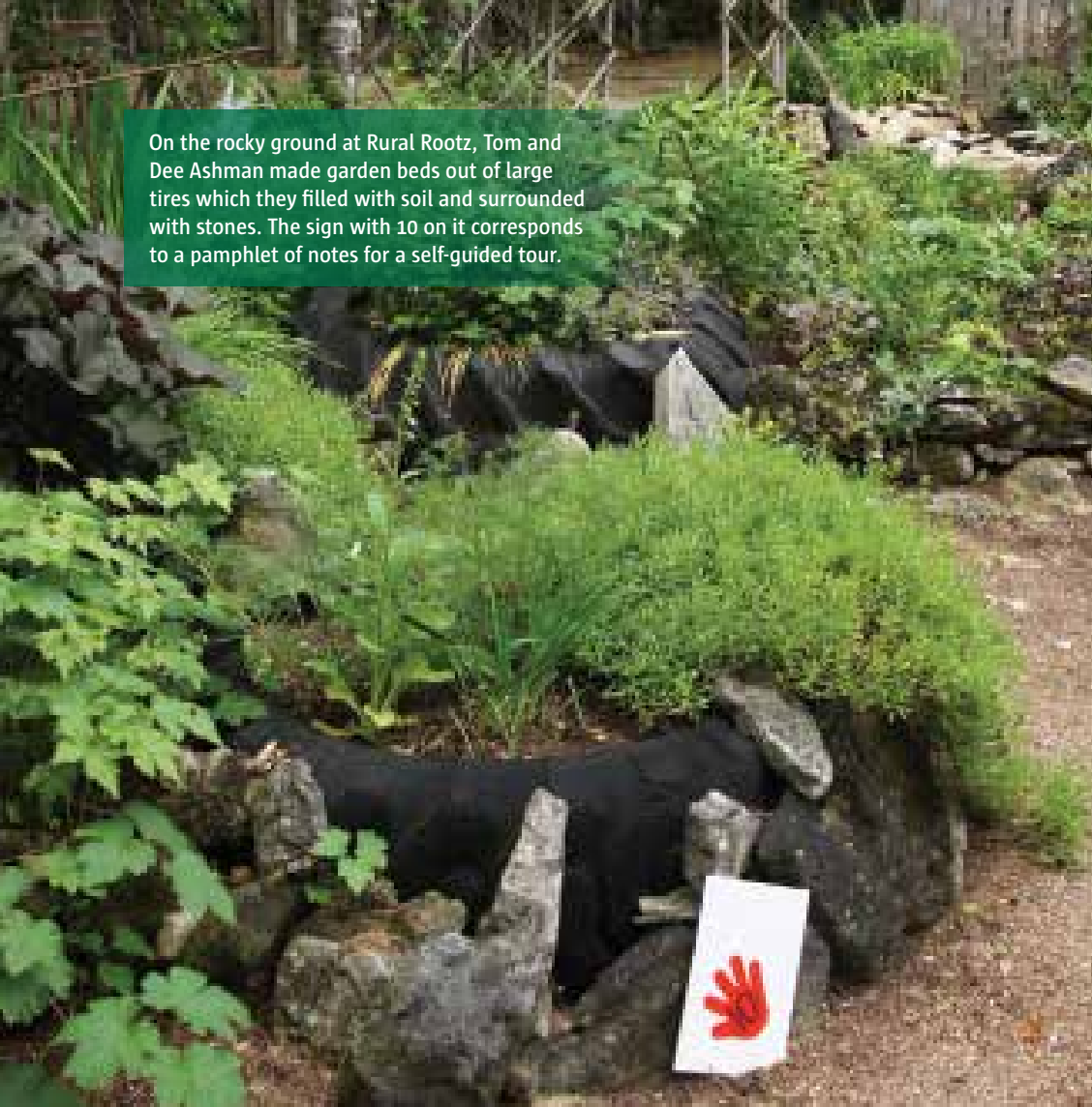
build it up." In addition, they planted potatoes and winter wheat to fix nitrogen to the soil.

They add "We now have a vibrant nutrient-rich base for growing and the soil supports a great balance of insects and earthworms."

From left, Judy Larkin, Brenda Sutherland and John Close are partners at Earthbound Gardens.



Dee and Tom Ashman at the edge of their full-sun garden, with the spirit catcher "Spirits Rising," created by Dee.



On the rocky ground at Rural Rootz, Tom and Dee Ashman made garden beds out of large tires which they filled with soil and surrounded with stones. The sign with 10 on it corresponds to a pamphlet of notes for a self-guided tour.

What to See

Earthbound Gardens consists of a variety of demonstration gardens, from hot, dry, sandy situations to wet, dry, and shady spaces. One third of the property is test gardens. There is a large garden centre, and the owners grow everything they sell. Specialists in lilies and daylilies, they sell from a vast inventory of both. In addition to plant sales, they provide landscape and design services. There is a garden gift shop and metal art for sale.

“We also love to share our enjoyment of what has been created at Earthbound,” they say. “We hold many events in the gardens, weddings, music concerts, NIA, yoga, photography shoots, workshops on edible plants, native plants, monarch butterflies.. the list goes on.”

At Keppel Croft, in addition to the gardens near the house, there is the Keppel Henge, an astronomically correct structure that was completed as their millennium project.



Bill built the Keppel Croft “ruin” which frames the peonies and other flowers with a view of the fields beyond.



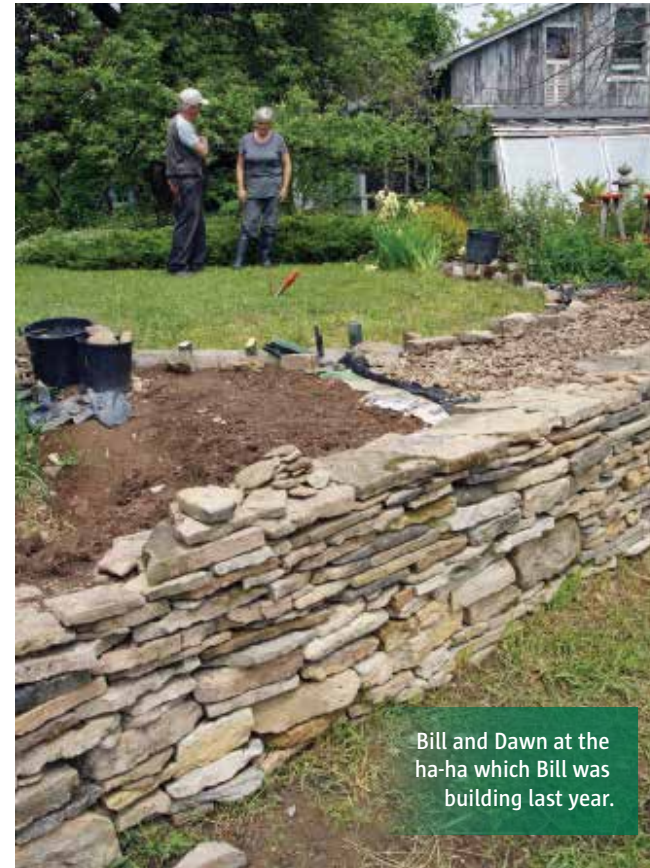
The astronomically correct Keppel Croft Henge was built by a group of friends as a millennium project. The central granite stone throws shadow on the encircling stones on the solstices and equinoxes.



Rural Rootz' raised vegetable garden beds have hoops attached for a variety of protective covers.



A gorgeous Tinkerbelle lilac was blooming at Earthbound Gardens in the middle of June last year.



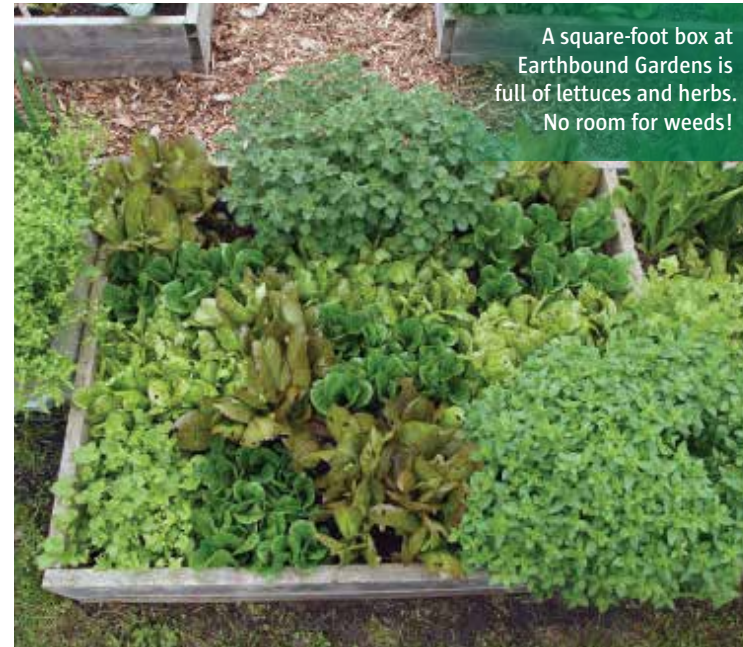
Bill and Dawn at the ha-ha which Bill was building last year.



The teal-painted Garden Room at Keppel Croft offers seating for beverages and picnics.



The large nursery and greenhouses at Earthbound Gardens are stocked with plants grown on site. Lilies are a specialty.



A square-foot box at Earthbound Gardens is full of lettuces and herbs. No room for weeds!



The white cobblestone Australian aboriginal Rainbow Serpent labyrinth at Rural Rootz.

There is also a Nature Trail that leads up to an impressive view of the Escarpment. Throughout the property are art installations, most of them created by Bill. Last summer he was building a drystone wall Ha-ha, although “Open-heart surgery slowed me down a bit,” he says.

Rural Rootz also has more features than can be fully appreciated in one visit. Close to the house are two separate, different kinds of labyrinths,

the simple Australian aboriginal Rainbow Serpent Labyrinth, and the European-style Bishop’s Labyrinth. There’s a satellite Bruce Trail Side Trail through the property, and crevice caves to explore. The gift shop is stocked with art by Dee, including spirit catcher circle paintings that can hang outside year-round. There are also professional healing sessions and tea reading offered at various times through the season. **NEV**

FIND OUT MORE:

Earthbound Gardens earthboundgardens.com

Keppel Croft keppelcroft.com

Rural Rootz ruralrootz.com

