

A photograph of a garden scene. In the foreground, there is a stone wall made of large, rough-hewn grey stones. To the left of the wall, there are green leafy plants and a cluster of small red flowers. To the right of the wall, there is a black cylindrical light fixture with a white globe on top, set in a concrete base. The garden is filled with various green plants and flowers, including pink and red blooms. In the background, there are more trees and a blue car parked on a street. The sky is clear and blue.

DECADES OF HISTORY

# Georgetown's Old Seed House Garden



The Sunken Garden has been created within old barn foundations that were used when the distinctive Tudor-style building of Dominion Seed House was expanded.

**T**he Old Seed House Garden in Georgetown exists thanks to volunteers and honours the legacy of a former Georgetown-based mail-order business, Dominion Seed House.



▲ The garden is located at 135 Maple Avenue with free parking near the entrance.



▲ Dramatic Weeping Purple Beeches have been closely planted to form a curving border and backdrop to the formal garden beds.



◀ In late spring many varieties of peonies border the formal gardens, offering a fitting tribute to the history of Dominion Seed House.

► This stunning colour combination from these irises and peonies is always a favourite.



In Georgetown on a Tuesday morning last spring, The Old Seed House Garden was busy with women and men weeding, planting annuals, and adding compost to beds. Because of COVID, these volunteers were spread

out, keeping a safe distance from each other. Yet in spite of or perhaps because of the pandemic, they were maintaining and improving the garden for all to enjoy.

Located at 135 Maple Avenue north of Guelph St., the garden is completely free.

There is no admission fee, and parking is free in a lot next to the entrance. At just under two acres in size, the garden consists of a sunken garden within old foundations that were part of the famous Dominion Seed House Tudor-style building, formal

gardens that lead to a gazebo, a drystone riverbed, a pond and lawns with sculptures.

### Plantings

One unusual element is the use of Weeping Purple Beech trees to form a curving border that defines the



▲ A close look at the Weeping Purple Beech reveals a variety of colour in the leaves. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT.

formal gardens. The tall, stately yet contorted trees form patterns in the sky while their dark leaves add distinct drama to the normal green of plants. Usually a single accent tree, this beech planting in multiples is a creative stroke of brilliance.

“At one time the purple beech trees circled the whole formal garden,” says Diane Crawford, co-chair of The Friends of the Old Seed House Garden, adding that what remains “is what has survived over the years.”

Peonies are a big part of

the formal gardens in spring and are appropriate for this site because Dominion Seed House, which used to trial and plant on the original roughly 60-acre farm, grew many different peonies, including heritage varieties that were imported from

France around 1930. Some of these remained in the fields until the property was developed by new owners: the light pink Germaine Bigot, rose red Eclataine, deep pink edged with silver Octavie Demay, white tinged pink Tourengelle,



▲ A walk along flowering shrubs with Weeping Purple Beeches towering darkly beyond. New paving stones have been laid since this photo was taken.



◀ One of two bronze sculptures depicting boys with animals. Created by John Robinson, they are dedicated to the owners of Dominion Seed House.

▶ Beverly de Jong's "Fantasy Gate" hints at elements from the rural past.



light pink La France, and the pink Marechal Vaillant and Modeste Guerin.

Paths through the formal gardens lead to a gazebo. Last summer there was a significant structural change to the fine gravel paths.

"New interlocking walkways have made the garden more accessible for wheelchairs, walkers and strollers," says Diane.

### Art in the Garden

Sculpture adds further interest to the garden. At the gazebo end of the formal gardens, small bronzes of young boys with animals, perch on stone pillars. A sign identifies the artist as John Robinson and acknowledges the former owners of Dominion Seed House.

The lawns of the garden are punctuated by large metal

sculptures. Three large leaves standing upright, entitled "Trio," are the work of Soul Metal. "Fantasy Gate" by Beverly de Jong is a tribute to the agricultural and rural past of the Georgetown area.

### Get Involved

Volunteers are welcome. Gardening work is done every Tuesday morning, 9 a.m. to noon in the season.

"No experience is necessary, and all ages are welcome," says Diane. "Volunteer because you like to garden, or want to learn more about gardening, or make new friends. It feels good being part of the community."

To donate to the gardens, mail cheques payable to The Friends of the Old Seed House Garden, c/o 113 Rexway Drive, Georgetown ON, L7G 1R3. **NEV**



▲ Soul Metal created this installation entitled "Trio."

## History of the Garden

**By 1928** — The mail-order seed company Dominion Seed House was established by Bill Bradley.

**1936** — The distinctive Tudor-style building was built on the roughly 60-acre farm along Guelph St. at the edge of Georgetown.

**1952** — Bill Bradley died and the business was given to his wife Alexandrina Bradley and daughter Margaret Harding.

**1993** — Dominion Seed House was sold to a Quebec firm and the business was relocated.

**1995** — Members of the Georgetown chapter of Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) decided to create a public garden on the site as a reminder of the history of Dominion Seed House. It is interesting to note that 2021 is the 50th anniversary of the Georgetown chapter of CFUW.

**1996** — A fundraising "Dig-Your-Own Plant" sale was held on the site to let people buy peonies, irises and daylilies. \$40,000 was raised.

**1997** — The property was sold for development. The eight-acre park portion would include the public garden.

**1999** — The Tudor-style building was demolished, leaving fieldstone foundations that were originally under a barn and were used when the Tudor-style building had been expanded. These foundations are visible in the Sunken Garden today.

**2002** — Friends of the Old Seed House Garden was formed, work began on the infrastructure of the garden, planting began in the fall.

**June 2003** — Old Seed House Garden was officially opened.



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