Afterword

LESSONS FROM THE OHIO GOVERNOR’S RESIDENCE AND HERITAGE GARDEN

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If you plan for a year, sow rice.
If you plan for ten years, plant trees.
If you plan for a hundred years, educate the people.
—Chinese proverb

This proverb reflects the attitude of the caretakers of the house and grounds known as the Ohio Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden. Some changes have been made with only one administration in mind, while other improvements have been thoughtfully planned to last as long as the house stands. All have been added to help educate visitors about Ohio history in one way or another.

Each governor’s term could be described as passing seasons in the life of the property. The early days of each administration are like springtime, when the house receives a good cleaning and a sprucing up so it feels like home to the new occupants. By the end of the term, autumnal sadness invades the grounds because the exiting family has learned to love the place despite any early qualms. Winter is at the doorstep when one governor leaves in January and the next one enters for the first time. Each

Bog Garden
new occupant adds history and works for the sustainability of the facility, realizing that Ohio’s governors serve not only as the head of state government but also as the steward of the house and garden they will call home during their time in office. It is an honor and a privilege, and it presents a wonderful opportunity to lead by example: to respect history and promote the future; to watch the changing seasons of the year as well as of political life; to distinguish what needs to be done for a day, a term, or eternity; and to make sure both the occupants and the facility age gracefully.

This is all brought into focus by watching the Heritage Garden throughout the year, as a lesson in sustainability and how nature plans for eons. All of nature works together to maintain a balance, ensure its future, and sustain life itself. Everything is in a perpetual state of being recycled and regenerated. Even the rocks that sustain liverwort, lichen, moss, and emergent ferns are repeatedly buffeted by wind and rain and slowly eroding into sand. Plants need sand to ease their ability to take root. The Peebles Limestone Outcrop is an excellent place to see this cycle at work.

One realizes that nature has developed a way to nurture itself and its progeny if left to its own devices. The fallen leaves and decaying logs add nutrients to the soil that in turn provide food for new plants to grow. This can easily be seen in the Woodland Wildflower Garden, where the leaves are intentionally left on the ground to decompose at their own pace and the logs quickly become covered with moss or mushrooms and are attacked by insects. The large fallen tree trunk in the Appalachian Garden is one of my favorite places to see this process at work: a hollow section allows a look inside at the gradual process of decay; traces of insect paths are visible under the bark; and mold and fungus cling to its outer covering.

Winter plays its part in the cycle of sustainability. Its snows provide a warm blanket for tender roots and the deep moisture many need to germinate in the spring, while the cold stratifies seeds to make them ready to sprout when the ground temperature is just right. Without this season, many plants could not sustain themselves. The spicebushes in the Appalachian Garden and the native wisteria on the Pergola are examples of plants that need the hardness of winter to release their offspring. Not all is brown and bleak in the winter. The Cranberry Bog provides its best color and sustains the image of renewal when it’s cold. The maroon pitcher plants are in
sharp contract to the lime green of the sphagnum moss and the red of the cranberry leaves. Add snow and this old fishpond becomes a living paisley.

Spring comes into its own when the ground temperature reaches 45 degrees. Some years we put a big thermometer in the East Lawn to see how much longer we have to wait. Seeing the Heritage Garden come back to life is a glorious experience. The early spring ephemerals, such as the Virginia bluebells and the trillium, in the Woodland Wildflower Garden race the catkins of the hazelnut in the backyard to herald its arrival. When the Lakeside daisies begin to bloom in the Alvar Rock Garden you know spring has arrived. The golden Alexanders and the shooting stars wake up the prairie. They try to outshine the soft pink of the Tidal Basin cherry near the First Family Terrace and the crossvine’s yellow and red flowers on the Wall Garden. Not to be outdone, the Edge of Appalachia Boulder covers itself in a cloak of native columbine.

Summer brings a bright succession of color that lasts into the fall, especially in the Prairie Garden. Everything from the yellow flowers of prairie dock and compass plant to the pinks of the purple coneflower, Sullivant’s milkweed, and blazing stars and the purples of the asters and Ohio spiderwort keep this area of perennial flowers exciting not only for the human eye but also for the birds and butterflies.
The Meadow Garden is also an excellent place to see a long display of color. Its best display is saved for fall when the ironweed and joe-pye weed are in their glory, but the false blue indigo and tall phlox make early summer almost as exciting. Each color is important because it attracts the particular visitor needed to carry on the species.

Fall is noted for its colorful leaves that add nutrients to the soil after they fall and are allowed to decay in place. They provide shelter for small animals, as do the hollow trees and stumps that add character to the yard. The nuts, or mast, from the trees give humans hints on what kind of year it has been and what kind of winter to expect and animals the food they need to survive. In turn, many plants depend on animals to bury their seeds so new plants can emerge in the spring. The shortening of the day signals all life to prepare for winter.

Nature is designed for long-term sustainability. The pawpaw tree, pitcher plant, and crossvine are wonderful examples of how nature has created each flower in such a way as to get its reproduction needs met. The brown blooms of the pawpaw attract its favorite pollinator, the fly. The pitcher plant’s lovely hanging flowers have only one way in and another way out for insects that fly into its maze. The crossvine’s trumpets are bicolored, in hopes that red will attract its favorite hummingbirds but,
just in case they have not arrived this early in spring, that yellow will bring insects to visit its store of nectar and leave with pollen. Other plants work hard to keep certain insects away. The cup plant is designed to catch water in the cup that forms where the leaves meet the stem, thus preventing ants from reaching its yellow flowers before flying pollinators do.

The relationship between plants and animals helps sustain them both. Some pairings are highly specialized. The milkweed, for example, is the host plant for monarch butterflies, and the wild blue lupine is the only sustainer of the rare Karner butterfly. Without their special hosts, many birds and insects will not have their needs for sustainability met. Some birds, like the finches, find the seeds of the native prairie plants a fall feast that will help sustain them through the winter months. We have noticed that in the seven years we have been incorporating native plants into the Residence gardens, the variety of native wildlife has increased dramatically. The Heritage Garden is encouraging native flora and fauna to multiply. Native plants provide food and homes for a great variety of insects and larger animals that have coevolved into the biodiversity needed to sustain us all.

Ohio’s geologic history laid the ground for plants to show us how they sustain themselves. The last 500 million years have given Ohio parts of five physiographic regions, each with a different bedrock, soil, and weather type and thus its own specialized plant communities (see appendix 1). These ecosystems meet in Ohio, which means that many plants are living on the edge of their preferred conditions. This gives the state a large number of threatened and endangered plants that need protection for their survival. Their sustainability is jeopardized by changing weather patterns, invasive nonnative plants, and human encroachment on the state’s remaining wilderness. Most, if not all, of Ohio’s endangered plant communities are threatened with extinction. Studying their adaptability to the home landscape and saving seeds are ways the Heritage Garden is helping native species survive.

The Heritage Garden has areas that mimic these diverse ecoregions and thus can help gardeners find native plants for
any type of conditions they face in their own yards. Some plants like the golden Alexander seem to do well in hot, dry, poor-soil prairie situations as well as in the cooler, darker areas of a shade garden. The inland sea oat is one of the few native ornamental grasses that thrives in light shade but tolerates sun very well. Blue pickerelweed loves to have wet feet so would adapt well to ponds. Silvery cinquefoil will become a groundcover under any condition. Ohio’s native rhododendrons and mountain laurel do better in acid soils created from sandstone, while arborvitae likes more alkaline environments derived from limestone. The two outcrops in the Appalachian Garden make it easy to see which soil type plants prefer.

The most interesting story Ohio’s plants tell is of their migration to survive our glacial history ten thousand years ago. As the land froze and was slowly covered by two-mile-high sheets of ice, seeds were carried southward by wind or animals and sprouted when they found an agreeable home. Some plants that are hardy enough to live in Ohio, and probably did at one time, migrated south and never made their way back. The Garden of the Lost holds several of these hardy southern plants such as the sweetbay magnolia and Alabama snow wreath.

As the glaciers retreated, boulders trapped in the ice left scars in the bedrock. Examples of this are seen in the striations on the alvar rocks and the groove in the glacial erratic, a sixteen-ton rock brought by ice from the Canadian Shield to Ohio that is now in the front yard. Plants soon realized that their favorite growing conditions were moving north too, and some began the slow process of following the cooler weather. The tamarack is one tree that worked its way south from Labrador to avoid the ice and then back. Some migrated northward only as far as the kettle lake bogs in Ohio, where they have stayed for the last ten thousand years. The Canadian hemlock is another example of northern boreal trees found in the Heritage Garden that are happy in some parts of our state. These trees illustrate the strong desire of plants to find places where they can thrive.

As the weight of the glaciers depressed the earth and allowed ocean waters to make their way to Ohio’s shores, Atlantic coastal plants such as bearberry came on a one-way trip down the St. Lawrence Seaway. Some of these now live on the Headlands Sand Dune in the Residence’s backyard.

Glaciers were not the only cause of plant migrations. The bigleaf magnolia in the Pebbles Dolomite Outcrop came to Ohio with the Teays River, the ancient waterway
that flowed from the Carolinas into Indiana before the glaciers pushed it southward to form the Ohio River. This magnolia’s only natural Ohio home is in Jackson County. This was the first of many plant-recorded examples of rivers or canals helping to transport the necessary genetic material for species reproduction.

After the glaciers melted, the state experienced a hot period that allowed a finger of the western prairies to advance across the state and bring ideal conditions for drought-resistant plants like gray-headed coneflower and prairie dock to become Ohio residents. As the weather cooled again, trees from the eastern forests began to expand their home on the west side of the Ohio River and created the vast beech and oak forests that sustained the Native Americans and frustrated the early pioneers.

Some plants in the Heritage Garden illustrate the deep genetic desire for the survival and sustainability of their species. The ginkgo, with its primitive fan-shaped leaf form, has its roots in the Permian period 225–280 million years ago. This tree was rescued from extinction by man’s desire to have it growing in his garden and is a perfect example of how man can play a positive role in nature’s sustainability.

There is so much to learn in the Heritage Garden about sustainability, not only about the way plants take care of themselves but also about their impact on man’s efforts to survive. The cultural history of plants is fascinating and speaks to man’s de-
sire to stay alive. The compass plant was used by the pioneers to tell directions. The flowering serviceberry told them when the ground was soft enough to dig. The hepatica is one of many examples in the garden of plants named after the body part whose ailment they were thought to cure. In this case, the shape of its leaves looks similar to the human liver and was thus given a name from the Greek for hepatitis by sixteenth-century observers who believed in the Doctrine of Signatures.

Ohio’s first residents used many native plants as food, medicine, or dyes. The groundnut vine has a tuber that fed the hungry, the wild yam helped relieve cramps, and the bloodroot provided face paint for the Native Americans, who brought crops like corn, squash, and beans with them on their migrations. These stories in ethno-botany are fascinating illustrations of the ways that humans and plants have interacted for centuries in a mutually beneficial relationship. If we protect the biodiversity of nature, it will continue to provide the means to help us enjoy life.

Plants will survive in less than ideal situations, but they will thrive if they get their needs for water, sun, temperature, and soil type met and they will need a lot less effort from humans to do so. Using native plants in the right spots will lessen the demand on other natural resources and help sustain our universe. Less water, pesticides, fertilizers, and mechanical means of control mean a healthier planet for us all.
As more and more land is turned into suburbia, it is important to provide new avenues for animal and bird migrations, and that requires an unbroken path of their favorite foods and habitats. Backyards filled with water spots and native plants for food and shelter provide hope for sustaining our wildlife. Restoring and linking native ecosystems are becoming crucial in maintaining natural paths of migration and habitat. Every garden and yard can be part of this effort. Plants and animals do not abide by man’s artificial boundaries.

By observing the shifting of plant and animal ranges, scientists are able to track the current period of global warming. It will be interesting to see which plants and animals move to better locales and thrive, which succumb to changing growing conditions, and which adapt to their new environments. Lessons for our own sustainability will be evident in the success of their efforts.

For some people, sustainability means a framework for avoiding catastrophe. One goal of the Ohio Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden is to help people realize that we must do better than the bare minimum if we hope to have a state that supports life to its fullest in the future. Plants are not optional. All the critical elements of life owe their foundation to plants. Plants clean the air and purify the water,
provide medicines, and feed humans and animals. Eighty-five percent of all the endangered species on earth are plants, yet we carelessly change our landscape without regard to the inhabitants those alterations destroy.

Homes supplied with power are not optional either. That is why solar panels have been installed and energy-efficient light bulbs are used and compost is made and plastic products are biodegradable. That is why a green roof and bioswale are planned and use of native plants is promoted. That is why the sun’s energy and rainwater are harvested in addition to fruits and vegetables. For it is by respecting nature and living in harmony with it that we have our best chance of surviving its long-term changes.

The Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden is a home and botanical garden where visitors can learn about native plants and the advantages of using them in their own gardens. It is an effort to encourage people to help sustain and preserve the fragile ecosystems that support our plant and animal life. It is a place where new ideas for saving energy both inside and outside the home can be seen in action. It is a place that can inspire sustainability of our planet and our livelihoods.

All the physical changes, the tours, the historic events, the seasons, and the progression of families truly make this property a “living museum” with a different exhibit on view each day. Each person who enters its gates adds something to its history and to its sustainability. Its evolving story continues to thrill its occupants and visitors.

The native plants in the Heritage Garden give the Governor’s Residence a sense of place, reflect a regional identity, and convey how well we have served as stewards of our heritage. Like the objects within the Residence, indigenous plants tell the history of places, reflect who we are, and give clues to the strength of our commitment to our own future.

We invite you to join in our efforts to sustain a better future for all living things by using native plants in your landscape and maintaining an ecologically friendly home. Only by doing so will we be successful in our human struggle to endure.

We are planning for a hundred years by educating visitors today. Thanks to your help, the Friends of the Ohio Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden can do even more.