

The 16th Annual Hillcrest Garden Tour

BY MICHELLE PHIPPS-EVANS



1. Several people gathered at the home of Donovan Anderson, the starting point of the tour.
 2. This beautiful flowerbed was part of the tour.
 3. Residents listened to homeowner Maxine Charles as she discussed her garden.
 4. The McDonald home is like a tropical rain forest.
 5. Beautiful flowers
- Photos by Carin Bigrigg & Justin Rydstrom

For the last 16 years, the residents of Ward 7's Hillcrest community have been showcasing their homes and gardens to the public. Many residents look forward to the tour – an event that celebrates spring in the Hillcrest neighborhood. Hillcrest – with its tree-shaded streets, colonial and Tudor-style homes, manicured lawns and civic-minded neighbors – attracted more than 60 people to this year's tour on June 6, despite overcast weather.

Tour visitors oohed and aahed as they gawked at the landscaping of the 12 homes featured during the guided walking tour. This year's tour showcased one of the newer sections of Hillcrest, bounded by Southern Avenue, 36th Street, 36th Place, Camden and some of the adjacent 34 Street SE, where the tour began at the home of Donovan Anderson.





Anderson, who does not consider himself a gardener, lined his walkway with azaleas, which offer an inviting pathway to his home. The garden also featured other shrubbery and flowers that bloom throughout the season.

This year, many homeowners on the tour were self-admitted minimalists. Homeowners describing themselves as such included Le-Grande and Vasser Baldwin. In their large corner lot with expansive space, they have created a serene backyard, sprinkled with several spring flowers like azaleas and hostas among others. A nice feature of their home is the lawn chairs and umbrella on a slightly elevated deck.

Another self-described minimalist is Gloria Gross, who has been living on 36th Street SE since 1990. Her goal was to create an "effortless" garden. In front of her house, she planted green-leaf Japanese maples, which offer a lacy distinction against the boxwoods. She also has begonias, which provide non-stop color throughout spring and summer.

One of the more creative gardens was seen at the home of Wiley and Maxine Charles. Maxine takes care of the garden, and she enjoys working on her sloping front yard by selecting the "right plant for the best location, keeping in mind the sun, watering needs and how the plants look with others around them," she said. She has a nice mix of annuals such as impatiens and begonias. What are striking are the several frog figurines she placed around the plants – frogs on swings, frogs in costumes. Those were fun to spot for the several youngsters joining their parents on the tour.

According to this year's garden tour committee chair, Carin Bigrigg, "The Hillcrest Garden Tour celebrates the community's spirit, our beautiful landscaping, the wonderful gardens, our shade trees, our parks and woods, and our individual homes."

And many of the homes and gardens were reflective of that individuality. Several homeowners such as George Awkward have been working for a while on their front beds, which included perennials and annuals. And yet others such as Grandville and Johnny Anderson built a backyard deck to enjoy the

breeze on a warm evening.

One of the few homes featured on previous tours was Kelley and Virgil McDonald's home, which has been included four times. Living in the home since 1967, Virgil said tending to the garden is his relief. "This is me," he emphasized. The tropical garden on a sloping hill is very calming and soothing. It's filled with perennials and potted tropical plants, and each year, he mixes annuals and garden ornaments among the perennials. In the middle of the sloping garden is a huge tree. The McDonald's have finally finished the fountain – a beautiful addition to the garden, where animal ornaments such as turtles and fish drink out of the pond. The garden is reminiscent of a Florida rain forest.

The tour rounded off at Spencer Fischer's home. He considers his yard a "labor of love." He installed planter boxes in the front yard, where he has easy-care perennials and mulch. He spends a lot more time in his backyard, in which he designed a courtyard to provide flowering and shade throughout the spring, summer and fall seasons.

The garden tour returned to the Anderson home where it began. Attendees sat at tables topped with fresh-cut flowers and enjoyed hot dogs, salads, drinks and cookies provided by the tour committee. Then, names were drawn and door prizes were given away to Frager's Hardware, Harris Teeter and other stores.

For a relatively inexpensive price – \$10 in advance and \$15 on tour day – the annual Hillcrest Garden Tour added value for attendees, who interacted with homeowners, who gave tips about weeding, fertilizing and mulching and general gardening.

Generally, the tour was easy to follow, even for those who preferred not to use a tour guide. It was a fun event for children and adults, who were able to learn more about flowers and plants, as well as the homeowners' ideas on the gardens they choose to maintain.

For more information or to see more photos of the tour, visit Hillcrest's website at www.hillcrestdc.com. ★



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