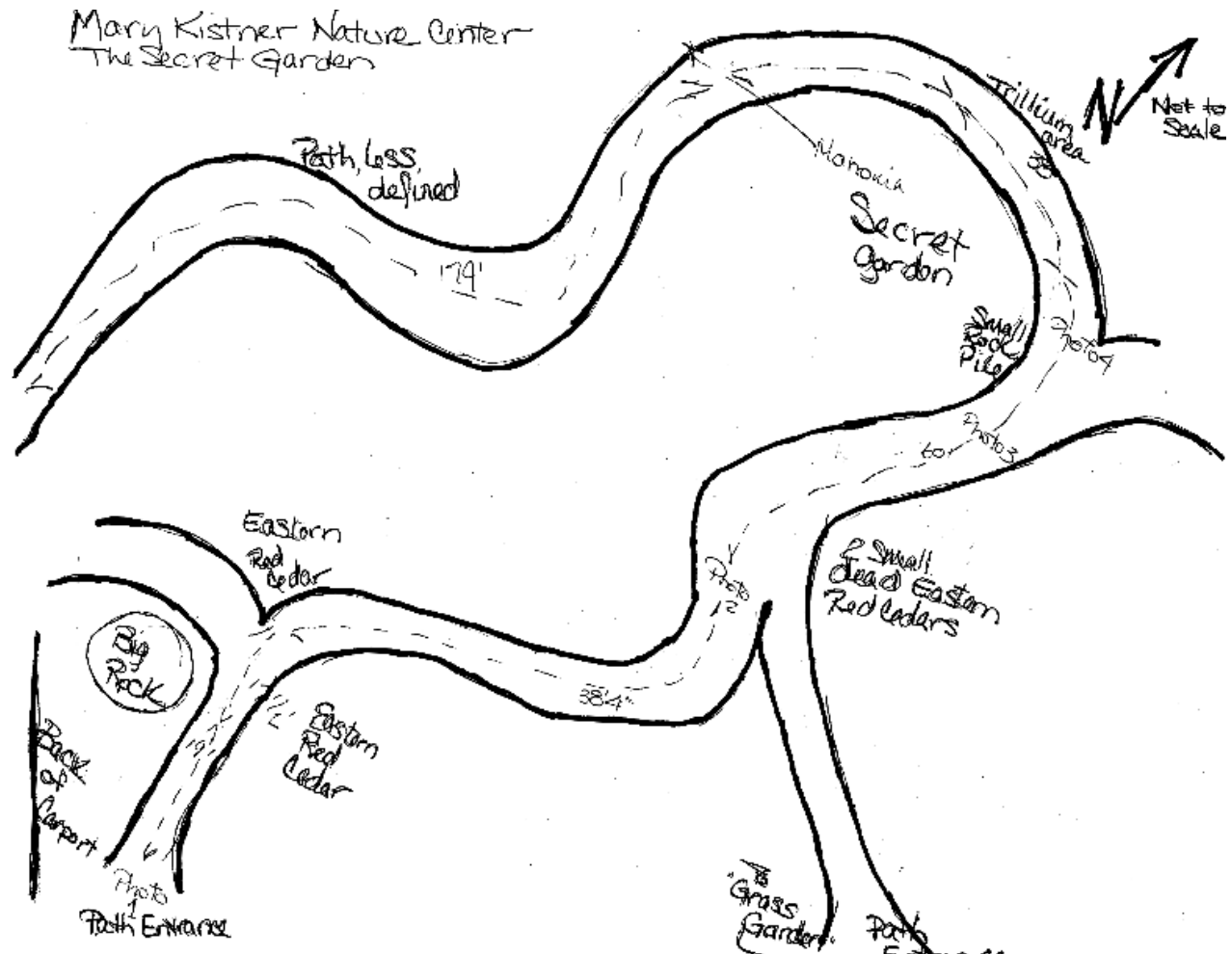


Uncovering a Hidden Gem: Mary's Secret Garden

Purpose: The project began the restoration of a second garden (a GCMGA grant funded the refurbishment of the Grass Garden in 2012), this time a woodland garden particularly special to Mary. Indeed, she called it her Secret Garden. The project continues the key concepts emphasized by GPLT: 1) highlight the use of native plants, here for a beautiful shade garden effect and habitat value; and 2) emphasize the importance of removing exotic invasives – including species used for ornamental purposes. This project continues our initiative to refurbish the gardens of a well-known, highly respected Gwinnett community member in a manner consistent with her artistic vision.

The project area (see layout below) encompasses about a half-acre or so of woodland gardens near the home, roughly circumscribed by a soft-surface path. Under Mary's active management during her lifetime, the paths were blown clean continuously; large, mature understory and overstory hardwoods were allowed to remain, while seedlings were cleared away to provide an open aspect at ground level; and species-specific plantings (mainly herbaceous varieties, both native and nonnative) were concentrated here and there. Additionally, she had planted *Vinca* spp. as ground cover and probably because she enjoyed the flower color. It had become rampant since then, covering much of the area of the garden and encroaching on the paths and elsewhere.



Steps in our project:

1. General cleanup of the area, including harvesting fallen branches and limbs.



2. Identify, to the extent possible, plants that should be left in place and protected (i.e., in the area near the heart of the garden is a cluster of Trillium spp. (left). Elsewhere is a cluster of blackberry lilies. Several clusters of Hellebore spp. are evident).

3. Remove invasives, including errant Mahonia volunteers, wild grape, Privet and Japanese honeysuckle.

Apply glyphosate to begin removal and control the Vinca (right). Remove weeds.



4. Redefine the paths, using fallen limbs from the property and retrieved during the cleanup.

5. Mulch or replenish mulch (installed by GPLT volunteers about 4 years ago) on the paths.

6. Identify areas for species concentration and where key points may need to have new visual elements (i.e., marking a path junction with a new plant). Identify species suitable for these areas; overall the garden is dry and in complete, but high, shade.

7. Add soil amendment to planting areas.

8. Plant native plants, including those relocated from other areas of the Kistner Center, concentrating for visual effect and impact, following Mary's earlier strategy, while recognizing the intense pressure caused by deer.

The project's beginning:



The paths, including a re-routing of a portion of the loop path to provide a slightly shorter, but more interesting walk around the Secret Garden, are in early stages of being cleared and mulched here by Gwinnett Master Gardeners. Much more general cleanup followed. Some of the fallen branches and logs were used to define the paths (left, Karen McGinty turns a dead tree into path lining. Far left, Mary Ann Maher gathers branches to define a path).



The photo, right, shows how the project area had become overwhelmed by a pervasive carpet of Vinca, along with wild grape and Japanese honeysuckle. Elsewhere, Mahonia volunteers grew, unwanted.



Workdays through the summer:

Once the pathways were clearly defined and freshly mulched – in time for the 2013 Gwinnett County Master Gardeners Association garden tour on May 18, since the Secret Garden was one of the gardens showcased in this event, we began the process of removing the Vinca and other invasives. This part of

the project was by far the most extensive and challenging: Vinca does not give up territory easily.



The garden was divided into segments (photo, left). During successive workdays during the summer, spraying with glyphosate (Roundup) killed off the Vinca and other invasives in successive segments, while Master Gardeners identified “saver” plants; weeded and cleaned up in other segments; and even planted donated Narcissus bulbs for springtime color. During this time, a list of appropriate native plants was assembled, researched and ordered.



Gradually, as the summer progressed into early fall, the green carpet turned to brown.



The Vinca was not entirely eradicated (left), but by early fall had been largely killed off in the garden area inside the path loop, in preparation for planting with native plants, both purchased and donated.

On Friday, October 4, the Kistner Center was a Gwinnett Great Days of Service project site, allowing final preparation of the planting area – and, as an added bonus, completion of an extra segment of pathway leading from the Secret Garden to other parts of the woodland area. A team of Wells Fargo employees, under the helpful guidance of Master Gardener Kent Ver Planck (left), cleaned up the areas of dead Vinca and vine, and spread 40 bags of mulch, donated by Buck Jones Nursery of Grayson.



Ready for Planting: In mid-October plants were assembled (left), ready to be installed in the newly prepared planting area.



The regular garden workday at the Kistner Center for October was a busy one, as we planted all the native plants intended for the

garden in this project, starting with 40 *Pachysandra procumbens* plants. As a test for effect at one path junction, we placed the Northern maidenhair fern. Its gentle swaying and nodding is pleasing and delicate. Species generally were clustered, consistent with Mary’s original approach. This first step to refurbishing the Secret Garden



extends the GPLT effort to create examples of the beauty of “doing the right thing” by creating useful, supporting habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife.

Native Species Installed During the Project

Plant Type	Qty.	Common Name	Scientific Name
Ground Cover	40	Pachysandra	<i>Pachysandra procumbens</i>
	6	Partridge berry	<i>Mitchella repens</i>
	6	Green and gold	<i>Chrysogonum virginicum</i>
Herbaceous	10	Wild ginger	<i>Hexastylis arifolia</i>
	2*	Northern maidenhair fern	<i>Adiantum pedatum</i>
	12	Dwarf crested iris	<i>Iris cristata</i>
	3	Atamasco lily	<i>Zephyranthes atamasco</i>
	4	Eastern bluestar	<i>Amsonia tabernaemontana</i>
Shrub	3	Florida anise	<i>Illicium floridanum</i>
	4*	Mapleleaf viburnum	<i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>

*NOTE: We are grateful to Piccadilly Farm for donating two Northern maidenhair ferns and to Nearly Native Nursery for donating a large Mapleleaf viburnum. Thanks, too, to Buck Jones Nursery, Grayson, for the donation of mulch. Additionally, thanks go to Gail Gerlitz for donating 18 Sweet box shrubs (*Sarcococca ruscifolia*), to be installed in coming weeks. While not a native plant, the fragrant scent of these shrubs will be a welcome addition to areas of the Kistner Center woodland gardens.

Gwinnett Master Gardeners who worked on the project:

Project Leader: Jackie Kujawa

Carol Hassell, Kent Ver Planck, Mary Ann Maher, John Roach, Karen McGinty, Paul Minor, Becky Wolary, Colleen Weinkle, Joann Wilson, Jessica Miller, Martha Whitman, Renee Beard.

GPLT Volunteers: Larry Gilleland, Paula Peterson.

Gwinnett Great Days of Service: Employees of Wells Fargo Bank.

Plan for future maintenance:

1. Regular watering will continue until the plants are established. 2. The Kistner Center is a regular Master Gardener volunteer project and so will have at least monthly oversight, weeding and care.