

2015 GCMGA Garden Tour Feedback

GARDEN SELECTION PROCESS

- Selection needs to start in March of 2016 for a 2017 tour. This was the most difficult part of the entire process.
- Highlight gardens in the north and central part of county next time.
- Having a mixture of private and public gardens worked well. We also had a mix of garden styles and sizes. The number of gardens on the tour worked well (10). Due to their location, travel time between them allowed just enough time to tour every one and take a lunch break.
- If the goal of the tour is to generate revenue AND educate the community, do not limit gardens on tour to those owned by Master Gardeners. I also believe the tour could be held annually so as to develop a following. HOWEVER....this would ONLY work if gardens on the tour will be a mix of GCMGA members and others. The biggest challenge is getting homeowners to agree to be on the tour.
- The date (3rd Saturday in May) worked well, but an early June date would work too.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

- Several duties were divided between the committee members. There was one person responsible for each of the following areas: Treasurer/Ticket Sales, Publicity (online and publications), Nursery ticket sales, Garden Angel Volunteers, Day of Tour volunteers, Education. For the next tour, we recommend adding a volunteer responsible for soliciting sponsors.
- Committee meetings were held in November, January, March and the week before the tour in May. This worked well because we didn't start the planning process until late July and the garden selections weren't finalized until the end of October. Starting the process in the Spring of 2016 could change the timeline for committee meetings. See task schedule document and committee meeting minutes for timelines.

REVENUE IDEAS

Get local sponsors to cover expenses and increase revenue. (nurseries, landscapers, vendors, local restaurants and garden related retail shops)

- Tour Benefactor level - \$500 in exchange for 4 tickets to the tour, hyperlink on the GCMGA tour website and Facebook page, company name listed on tour ticket
- Tour Sponsor level - \$250 in exchange for 2 tickets to the tour, company name listed on tour ticket, GCMGA tour website and Facebook page,
- Tour Friend level - \$100 Company name listed on tour ticket

TICKET SALES:

- Six week time period (April to mid-May) worked well for selling tickets on the website. Folks will put the date on their calendar, but many won't buy until time is closer. The two month period worked well for distributing tickets to members to sell.
- For future tours, we suggest the following price structure:
 - Members of GCMGA pre-sale - \$15 only available at GCMGA monthly meetings and events.
 - Non-member pre-sale & online - \$20
 - Day of Tour - \$25
- Arrange with local nurseries, hardware stores and home decorating retailers to sell tickets in exchange for a link on the tour website.

- Ask A Master Gardener Tables at local nurseries are a great way to get the word out, but I don't think it needs to start until 3-4 weeks before the tour. Per Payge Cox, Growers Outlet would have been a better location for ticket sales in that area than Pike Nursery. Nursery sales are most successful in the local tour area. We sold very few tickets at the nurseries, but those that did sell were only in Loganville.
- Online advance ticket sales started April 1 and ended the Monday before the tour. PayPal worked well and garnered more advance tickets than in the past. The last week buys would most likely have been higher except for the weather forecast. Higher than normal day-of sales suggests that people waited opting to spend an extra \$5 that day rather than lose \$15 if rained out. Emailing the response rather than snail-mailing a ticket saved both time and money. Cut-off for advance tickets should remain five days ahead of the tour.
- TICKETS were printed in tri-fold on glossy white paper. Consider half page tickets next time. It's easier to fold them! Include a map of the tour gardens on the ticket to make it easier for visitors to plan their starting point. The gardens were listed on the ticket in the order in which they should be toured. However, because we didn't want visitors to start at one of the public gardens, this created a bit of backtracking for directions. I'm not sure how this could have been prevented, given the location of our gardens. In retrospect, it might have been better to start the tour at the garden in a location most central in the county. Regardless, ask one of the homeowners to double check the order of the gardens on the tour and the directions, before printing, especially if coordinators are not intimately familiar with the area.
- We waited until the week of the tour to include the addresses of the gardens on the website and flyers. I believe the addresses and/or a map should go up as soon as ticket sales start so folks know where the gardens are located when they make their purchase.
- Since tickets couldn't be sold at the public gardens, a flyer was printed with the map and a list of addresses for anyone who stopped there without a ticket. We also printed a few copies of full directions, but I don't think that was utilized and wouldn't do it again.

MARKETING:

- Marketing materials (postcard or bookmark) need to be ready for the GGIA meeting in January and the Gwinnett Garden Show in February
- Approval from Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation is required before anything (fliers) can be posted on their property. Start that approval process at least 3 months before the tour. Marketing materials must have the approval logo on them in order to be posted.
- The Facebook page reached over 350 people- www.facebook.com/GCMGAgardentour
- Update as soon as date is decided. Posts highlighting each garden reached the most people. This was definitely worth the effort.
- See the document listing all media contacted for details. Highlights include online calendars like Walter Reeves, AJC, and Gwinnett Daily Post. Flyers were sent to all Garden Clubs in Gwinnett. Flyers were posted in local nurseries and libraries.

EDUCATION COMPONENT:

Worked well, would definitely recommend doing this again. Feedback on Info Boxes was positive.

VOLUNTEERS:

Two Docents were assigned to each garden for 2 shifts, (9:30am - 1pm and 12:30pm - 5pm) with the intention that one would take tickets while the other answer questions and tours the garden with visitors. Docents can take turns at this activity during their shift. This information was included in the instructions, but unfortunately, at a few of the homes, the docents only took tickets. It is recommended that this information be conveyed at the time volunteers are recruited so they

understand their duties. If a garden has difficult terrain, this should be conveyed to the docents in case there are physical limitations which prevent them from walking the yard.

PRE-TOUR

- Holding the meeting at the Extension Service office on Wednesday afternoon before the tour worked well. Julie and I brought some light refreshment for the committee.
- The pre-tour was limited to only those volunteers who were working on the day of the tour. It was requested that they purchase tickets anyway. I recommend that the pre-tour be limited to a few hours in the am on Friday before the tour.
- Consider having a separate day for homeowners to tour each others' gardens or they can tour on Friday afternoon.

SIGNS

We were able to reuse the signs from 2013, but we had to 'white out' the date. New signs will likely be needed for the next tour. Signs should not have the date printed on them so they can be re-used from year to year.

GARDEN ANGELS

Most homeowners did not take advantage of this program. However, it was nice to offer it. I feel it helped us recruit gardens for the tour! In the future, there should be specific parameters for angels working in gardens and a requirement that the homeowner be out in the garden with the volunteers, as well as offering lunch and/or refreshments.

OTHER DETAILS

- All documents related to the 2015 tour are located on Dropbox. Printed copies are also in the Garden Tour binder with previous tour information.
- Support from the GCMGA Board was excellent. They let us do the organizing without micro-managing. Copying Margaret (she was our liaison to the board) on all of the correspondence was an easy way to be sure there weren't issues with us making decisions in conflict with board policy.
- Members were encouraged to support the organization by buying tickets whether or not they were able to attend the tour. Marlene's plea at the April meeting helped support this philosophy.
- There are two notebooks available with written details for the 2011, 2013, and 2015 tours. The notebooks are currently in the possession of 2015 President, Carole Teja.
- All the forms, notes and agendas from the 2015 tour are posted on DropBox.

Linda Edwards and Julie Foster, Co-Chairs