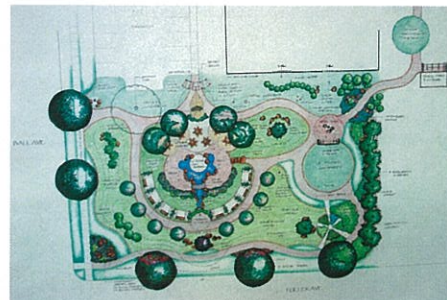


## **"Little Garden" Has Big Impact Kent MSU Extension Grand Ideas Garden**

The MSU Extension "Grand Ideas Garden" was the brain child of a group of MSU Extension Volunteers in 2003. When the MSU Extension office was notified that the office would be moving to a new location at 775 Ball, this enthusiastic group went to work visioning and fund raising for a garden the size of two city lots adjacent to the new building. With the help of volunteer landscape architect Larry Finneran of Twin Lakes Nursery, plans were drawn for a system of pathways and garden spaces to support multiple educational uses. The garden design featured elevations, a grand waterfall and of course, plant displays of every kind. While financial gifts were requested from MSUE Master Gardeners, the local green industry stepped up in a huge way support the garden, providing funds, in-kind gifts of plant material, use of equipment and labor.



The 2003 late-fall Ground breaking was followed by an early spring which revealed an new, undulating space representing opportunities no one had ever expected. Each passing season has been marked with installations of new plant material, brick pathways, arbors, container plants and a long-awaited water feature consisting of cascading falls, an upper "bog" and lower pond.

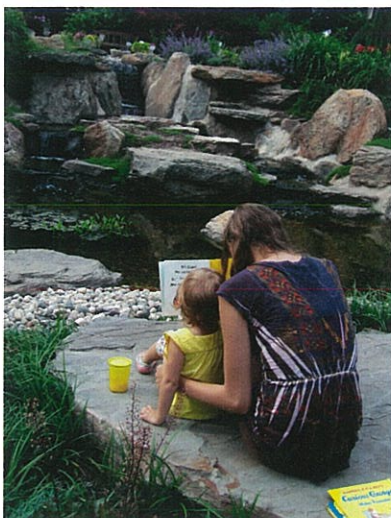
The latest addition to the Grand Ideas Garden is a "native plant" garden that also acts as a bio-swale for the building's flat roof. Capturing and mitigating water during heavy or light rain, two "ponds" are surrounded by plants representing the best Michigan natives, regional and U.S. native plants. The garden also attempts to demonstrate some native cultivar comparisons side-by-side. The native area is designed with the home landscape in mind, focusing on plants that have a "tidy" appearance and do not become maintenance issues.



Green industry partners have enjoyed growth in their own businesses due to ideas "planted" by the Grand



Ideas Garden. Consumers visiting the garden consistently comment that they were inspired to make purchases they might never have made. 83% say that they will adopt a new gardening practice or make a purchase of new plant material within the next season. With no admittance or parking fees, the garden averages over 2,500-3,500 visitors each summer and has played host to dozens of bus tours from in and out of state.



As an outdoor learning lab, the impact this garden has had for the MSU Extension Master Gardeners has also been significant. An extension of class-room learning, the hands-on component gardeners can receive in sessions here make a lasting impression leading to environmentally sound gardening decisions in their own back yard.

Perhaps the biggest surprise has been the impact the greater Ball/Bradford neighborhood has seen with the garden becoming a safe, community gathering place. Area children and adults can be seen enjoying and learning from the garden during daylight hours in nearly any weather.

Six Junior Master Gardener courses have been conducted since the garden's inception which evaluations have shown will leave lasting impacts with neighborhood children. All the plants are labeled and new info stations are planned for future education.



The Grand Ideas Garden team of volunteers working with MSU Extension Educator Rebecca Finneran has limitless possibilities for growth of the garden. As the spaces and plantings formalized over the past few years, educational efforts have expanded with increased signage, events, classes and workshops. Still to come in the Grand Ideas Garden are displays of herbs both in containers and the ground, vine arbors and natural stone and brick paver idea pathways.



**Thank you for visiting today!!**