



ROBERT W. MONK GARDENS

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A conversation with Darla Zastrow

Q) Would you have ever thought that a chance meeting with Mr. Robert Monk would lead to the formation of RWMG?

A) Not in my wildest dreams would I have thought that I would be involved in the formation of RWMG. Three things came into play at the moment that I met Mr. Monk—I had fantastic grandparents when I was growing up which led me to an incredible fondness toward the “elderly” so I was a softy when I met Mr. Monk, I had much interest in botany in college, and I had a selfish part too come forward and that was to preserve the land so that I could continue to enjoy it.

Q) When you look back at what has been accomplished and what is still to come, how do you feel?

A) When I review what has been accomplished since the concept of the garden was formed in May of 2001, I feel amazed. In the first year or two of

Cont. pg 5

Thank You River Valley State Bank for providing funding for purchasing the fence needed to protect the RWMG from marauding deer!

Thank You for Growing the Garden!

“Gardening is grown-ups’ way of justifying getting our hands and feet dirty.”

Anonymous garden guru



What Does it Take to Make a Garden Grow?

Patience, perseverance and people. It will take generous amounts of all three to make the Robert W. Monk Gardens a reality. What started as a chance meeting between Darla Zastrow (read more about her in this issue) and Robert Monk III has led to the unification of a dedicated group of volunteers who for several years have been working quietly and diligently to set the foundation for the gardens.

Educating the general public about what it takes to build a 20+ acre botanical garden is just one of the challenges facing the volunteers. Dispelling preconceived ideas of what the Wausau area is and will be as a community in the future are two hurdles we are overcoming every day. First, let me address the comment that I have heard when sharing the exciting news about the gardens. I have been told that Wausau is too small and too conservative. And, most shocking to me, “Who wants to look at 20 acres of plants?” The first two objectives actually work in our favor! Smaller towns such as Wausau and neighboring towns still have what larger metropolitan areas are trying to recapture, a true community. We are fortunate that when our communities rally together to create something great, we know first hand that our friends, neighbors and relatives are reaping the benefits of our labors. Wausau’s conservative nature is also an advantage. Communities that are conservative allocate their funds towards multi-faceted projects. When resources are more limited, projects which are given the go ahead are certain to have a profound effect on the community. The dedication required to work with more restricted resources also ensures that those who step up to the plate are fully dedicated to the mission at hand, for we know that everyone in a smaller community plays a big role in our neighbors’ lives and well being.

What about the question, “Who wants to look at acres upon acres of plants?” (Fellow gardeners, I know this is difficult to hear, but we must be patient.)

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Help Grow the RWMG!



From Our Gardens to Yours

Everyone at the RWMG has a keen interest in plants and has dabbled, some more than others, in transforming our yards into small botanical wonders of their own. As the Gardens are constructed, we will share some of our favorite cultivated plants featured at the RWMG. But until then, we will pass along our **Green Thumbs Up** for plants we have tested and enjoyed in our own gardens. We hope you enjoy our selections as much as we have!

Cleome (Cleome Hasslerana)

There is a fabulous pink-purplish haze of color throughout my gardens thanks to this never disappointing flower. Traditional, old fashioned and I believe often overlooked, the Cleome or Spider Plant is a vigorous grower which requires no special attention and generously reseeds itself. The seedlings have been very easy to transplant to more appropriate spots in the gardens. (Volunteers never spring up where we want them to!) The colors of the second generation are often not true to the parent plant, but never-the-less striking in color. They thrive in full sun, have reached 5-6+ feet in height and require no staking. Blooming from mid summer to late fall, they have been a true gem in my gardens. It takes a strong back and thick gloves to clear them out in the late fall for their roots, thick stalks and small stickers put up quite the fight! But don't clear them out too soon, wait until the seed pods have opened and dispersed their seeds. I mix mine with cat mint, Verbena Brazilian, roses, Gay Feather, pink Geraniums and Black-eyed Susan for easy, year-round color.

In each issue we will discuss a particular plant native to Wisconsin and zone appropriate for the RWMG. We do not promote, or encourage in any manner the harvesting of wild vegetation from the parks, forest and other natural lands of Wisconsin. Many plants are endangered, threatened or risk being categorized as such in the near future. A plant that may appear to be abundant in your area may very well be scarce throughout the state. If you are fortunate to have a strong colony of a particular plant in your area, enjoy it and protect it. Even plants that are in great abundance throughout the state should not to be disturbed. By discussing Wisconsin native plants in detail we hope to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the fabulous diversity of vegetation in our state while reinforcing the need to respect the precarious condition of many species. If you choose to incorporate native vegetation in your own gardens, the RWMG believes the most responsible way to do so is by purchasing plants through reputable nurseries that propagate plants rather than harvesting plants from the wild.

Take a moment to enjoy your garden with a friend. Sip coffee, listen to the birds, smell your flowers. Talk about the RWMG and what it has and will have to offer everyone. Become a Friend of the Robert W. Monk Gardens and take the first step of turning our dream, and *your* dream into a reality.

Gardens are only at their finest when you have some to share them with. To become a Friend, please call Darla Zastrow at 715-261-6282 or at dzastrow@uwc.edu

Native Plant Spotlight: Common Blue Violet

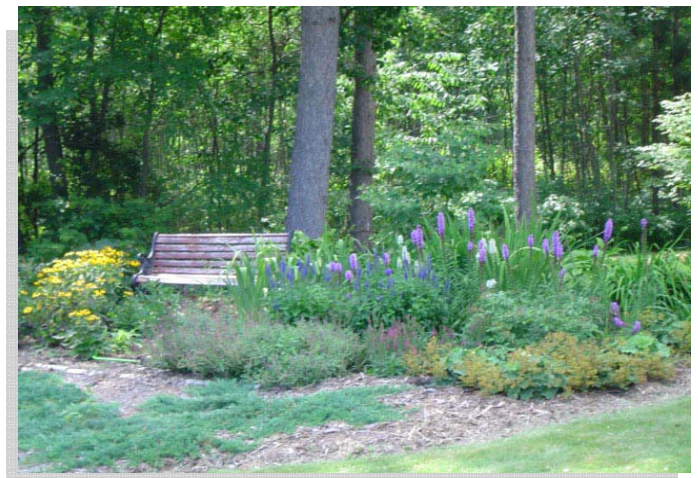
Photo of the Wood Violet



It is fitting that the premier issue of the MONK newsletter is dedicated to our State wildflower, the Wood Violet. It was a close race, but in 1908 the Wood Violet beat the wild rose, trailing arbutus and the white water lily as the plant chosen by Wisconsin school children to represent the state. Perhaps it's the Wood Violet's commonality that pushed it to the front of children's minds. The violet thrives in many conditions: roadsides, low-wet woodlands and of course, your lawn! The flowers, ranging from deep blue to almost white with specks of blue are one of our earliest blooming flowers making their debut in April.

Identification:

Herbaceous. Variable flower color from deep blue to white with blue markings. Petals are bearded near the center of the flower. Leaves are variable as well but not to the same extent. The Wood Violet has only basal heart shaped leaves which are bluntly toothed and appear on long stems. The plant is less than a foot.





ROBERT W. MONK GARDENS

Future Reads of the RWMG Reading Room

[The Cloud Garden: A True Story of Adventure, Survival and Extreme Horticulture.](#) By Tom Hart Dyke

[No One Gardens Alone: A Life of Elizabeth Lawrence](#)
By Emily Herring Wilson

[The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World](#)
By Michael Pollan

[The Orchid Thief](#) By Susan Orlean

[The Botanist and the Vintner: How Wine Saved the World](#)
By Christy Campbell

[The Tulip](#) By Anna Pavord

**Purchase at [Powells.com](#)
& help the RWMG Grow!**

Order Your Copy Today! A percentage of every purchase made at [Powells.com](#) via the RWMG website goes directly to the gardens. So while you use the **RWMG Reading Room** to help build your own library of great botanically inspired reads, you are helping the RWMG grow at the same time! So read on, and together we will grow our minds and the RWMG.

Help us Grow the RWMG Reading Room! While visiting [Powells.com](#) be sure to view our very own Wish List! Purchase a book from our Wish List for the future RWMG reading library and you will help us secure a collection of books available to the community for generations to come! To access our Wish List use the email address: monkreadingroom@gmail.com

The RWMG Reading Room

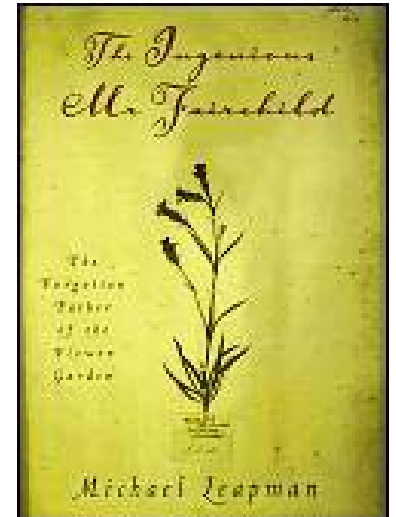
Delightful distractions to engrossing studies on gardens, garden design, botanical discoveries and gardeners past and present. It is all part of a pastime (and some may say an all consuming passion) we celebrate.

The Ingenious Mr. Fairchild: The Forgotten Father of the Flower Garden

An award-winning journalist pens a fascinating account of the life and times of Thomas Fairchild, a London nurseryman who discovered hybridization and paved the way for the growth of gardening as a cultural obsession.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Leapman writes on gardening and other topics for several newspapers and magazines, including *The Economist*, *The Garden*, and *Gardens Illustrated*. He is a former editor of *The Times Diary* and was also the paper's New York correspondent. An authority on London, he has written and edited a number of books about the city including *London's River and Eye-witness Guide to London*. His first book, *One Man and His Plot*, was about the allotment in Brixton, South London, which he and his wife Olga still cultivate.



Interested in meeting other members of the RWMG Reading Room? Want to suggest a book for a future selection? Then drop us a line. We are happy to organize a regular gathering of like minded book enthusiasts. In the future, we hope that you will bring your love of reading and gardening and join us for monthly RWMG Reading Room meetings at the Gardens. Until then, we can help you secure a location to hold RWMG Reading Room events.

For more information contact Jennifer at:
monkreadingroom@gmail.com

Help Grow the RWMG



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What Does it Take to Make a Garden Grow? cont....

The RWMG is not just 20 acres of plants! Gardens are people, friends and communities set against a backdrop of water, plants, stone and light. We are creating a collection of unique gardens which will provide a green space within our community. We are creating a place of learning. We are creating a place where a healthy lifestyle is nurturing our bodies and our minds. We are creating a place of peace for those in distress. We are creating a place where events, such as weddings and business gatherings are celebrated. We are creating a place where tourists will visit, boosting our economy. We are creating a place each one of us can be proud of.

Patience and People, two ingredients to making any garden grow! The last garden I installed was 20X40. I relied on my husband to remove the sod and haul four trailers of black soil from the yard waste center. I relied on the yard waste center to provide the soil. I relied on the expertise guidance of the people at Down to Earth (6104 N. 52nd Ave.). I relied on neighbors donating their pine needles to create paths and I spent several weekends, moving and sculpting soil, planting, watering, fertilizing and tending my new little garden. Now imagine 20+ acres!

We are undertaking a massive garden project and we will need people and patience. The Master Plan is broken down into phases, allowing us to grow and enjoy the Gardens before all the individual gardens are installed. Sculpting the land, designing the plantings, installing public utilities, building the visitors' center and staffing the gardens will take a combined effort of many people and time. Funding is key to the development and continued growth of the gardens and many corporations and private citizens are doing their part with generous donations. There are also countless ways everyone can help grow the Gardens. We will need help hosting fundraising events, clearing the dreaded buckthorn, guiding tours, planting flowers, and just spreading the news. This is a community garden that will be built by the community. Events are already being planned which allow supporters of the Gardens to experience the joy of the Gardens, even before the first fence post is up!

Contact the RWMG Today &, Help Us Grow the Garden, Together



The Pink Lady Slipper
in bloom at the
RWMG pine forest.

Garden Notes

*Driving along Rib Mountain Drive last evening with my new books and coffee I felt a bittersweet happiness as I waited for the traffic to pass. I gazed at the mountain behind a backdrop of signs and bright parking lot lamps. Over the past 10 years I have witnessed Wausau grow with leaps and bounds. Sometimes it was exciting, sometimes necessary but always foreshadowing an unpleasant truth: Wausau's green spaces are shrinking. It's hard to imagine, with Rib Mountain, Nine Mile Recreational Area and an abundance of forests and farm lands, but the truth is, other cities and large towns that were once like Wausau, are now creating ways to recapture what we **now** have. Much of the area's beauty will be here for years to come. But how much will be open to the public? Public spaces must be created and preserved today, before the land crunch sets in. Am I an alarmist? I hope not.*

But I would rather help to create a public garden today, than regret my apathy years from now.

For the moment I sit here by the pond at the future Monk Gardens a bit longer. I watch the sky turn a pleasant bone color with crickets singing and Robins calling out "bed time!". I look forward to the day when this garden is full of children and families enjoying one of Wausau's precious, public green spaces. JB

Help Grow the RWMG

Q & A With Darla continues

working on the garden concept, I was very impatient at how slow it seemed to move along. Now, as I look back, I am very pleased at what has been done. Since we now have a master plan for the garden prepared by Marshall, Tyler and Rausch I can look forward to the future of the garden with a sigh of relief. The difficult part of the formation of RWMG is definitely done and now the future holds great promise through having a garden plan, a wonderful board of directors, a supporting friends group, and public knowledge about the garden.

Q) What has been the greatest surprise about this process so far?

A) When I originally began working on establishing a botanical garden, I was very concentrated on the plant aspect. I was amazed at how much I had to learn in addition to the plant life. Such learning included, but not limited to, making a mission statement, writing by laws, forming a non-profit organization, getting an environmental assessment, putting together a board of directors, forming a friends group, getting the definition of a “botanical garden” in the city statutes (while pleading the case in front of the city council), deciding what type of residential zoning the garden should be in (definitely R-1!) and assisting in the making of a business plan.

Q) After a day’s of work of planting trees and making plans, what do you go home with or what are your thoughts about the gardens?

A) I think to myself, “What a sucker I am for the elderly!” I really believe that if I had met a younger person that day when I got caught trespassing, I would not have taken on this project. Wanting a botanical garden was Mr. Monk’s vision, not mine. I want Mr. Monk to succeed at this project and I am helping in any way that I can to make his dream a reality. Also, since I have volunteered on this project for 4 years counting, I decided that I could put in my two cents worth and get an enabling garden in the plan. I personally feel very accomplished that the enabling garden made it in the first phase of the master plan. I want the enabling garden for my son who has autism and for all the other people with disabilities and their caregivers.

Q) How or what keeps you motivated with such a long term project?

A) Now it is Mr. Monk, but when the garden is established it will be my son Seth and all of the other people with disabilities. I was the one that met Wayne Geurink and asked him to be a board member. Wayne gives me the drive too to see this garden through because he is wheelchair bound. **This garden is going to be fantastic for everyone.**

Q) You spend much time with Mr. Monk, our garden’s benefactor, what is that time with him like?

A) I love the time I spend with Mr. Monk. I am so comfortable with him that I don’t hesitate to ask him whatever comes to my mind. I think I could sit for hours listening to him tell stories. I don’t get to spend as much time with him as I would like to though because of other commitments and I suspect that I will regret that when he passes on. He has a twinkle in his eye though that I will never forget. I wish I would have met him a long time ago, but that did not happen. When it is time for him to go, I will miss him terribly but I will continue to work on his dream of having a botanical garden always.

Darla is a graduate of UWMC and UWSP and is an Instructional Specialist/Associate Lecturer for the Department of Biological Sciences at UWMC. She met her husband, Craig, when they were both students in microbiology at UWMC. Craig is a graduate of UWMC and UWO and is a Nurse Practitioner for Cardiovascular Associates. They have 2 sons, Seth and Sam, who have spent so much time at the botanical garden site with their mom that Darla is forever grateful for their patience. “I hope that I have created a desire in them to appreciate what nature offers and what hard work and determination can do for you.” Darla.

Friends of the RWMG
Together We Nurture Our
Minds, Bodies & the Gardens

Friends of the Robert W. Monk Gardens is an opportunity for you to meet others who are interested in seeing the Gardens grow. The Friends provides people, just like you, an opportunity to be part of something rather spectacular. Educational opportunities at the gardens and field trips will allow you to grow your mind while you help grow the gardens. Friends will give you an opportunity volunteer at the gardens with fundraising events, land improvement work sessions and see firsthand how a 20 acres will grow into a marvelous collection of botanical gardens.

Become a Friend, and
help Grow the RWMG.

To become a Friend, please call
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at dzastrow@uwc.edu



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BEYOND THE GARDEN GATE

Issues, events and politics that effect the natural areas of Wisconsin & the Upper Midwest.



When the forests' natural duff layer disappears, so do small mammals and spring flowering plants such as Trilliums which rely on the cool, damp layer for protection and life sustaining nutrients.

Read More about the Duff layer!

[Audubon Magazine](#) an on-line article March, 2003.

[Wisconsin Natural Resources](#) magazine, online August, 2005

[Smithsonian Magazine](#), online article August 2000.

Earthworms have been a gardener's secret weapon and desired friend for generations. Gardening shows and magazines alike have sung their praise. However, a new study of the disappearing duff layer in Wisconsin's woods is starting to change the way we view our wiggling yard mates.

As a result of ice sheets passing over our area tens of thousands of years ago, the decomposition process which occurs on the forest floor was relegated to fungi and bacteria, not earthworms. In reality, earthworms are an invasive animal in the upper Midwest. The culprits are often brought in via garden soil, composted materials, anglers, road maintenance vehicles and such. With the introduction of earthworms, the delicate balance established by the ancient ice sheets was disturbed. Causing great concern among scientists is the rapid disappearance of the traditional and essential forest duff layer. Duff is the loose, fine soil with small roots made of decomposing leaf litter. The duff layer and the vegetation and animal life it supports is disappearing due in part to exotic worms. Forest areas effected by the worms are obviously lacking the soft cushion of duff. In a healthy northern Midwest forest, fallen leaves may take 3-5 years to decompose. When worms are present this cycle is reduced to 4 weeks; drastically upsetting the forest's healthy cycle. Bare, dry soil with little sign of life is evident where worms have encroached on the natural bacteria and fungi. The earthworms also rob vegetation of the nutrients they need to survive. Many spring flowering plants such as the trillium rely on the duff layer for life. When the duff disappears so does the spring ephemerals. When the native plants are starved out, invasives move in. This struggle is only exacerbated by over grazing of deer. The plant diversification is drastically reduced as is the existence of small mammals which rely on the cool, damp layer. So our forests are fighting a battle from two fronts: worms below and deer from above.

What You Can Do to Help: Never dispose extra fishing worms on the shore line. Ensure the soil around transplanted plants is free of worms. Try to use locally made compost and top soil to minimize the distribution of worm species.



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