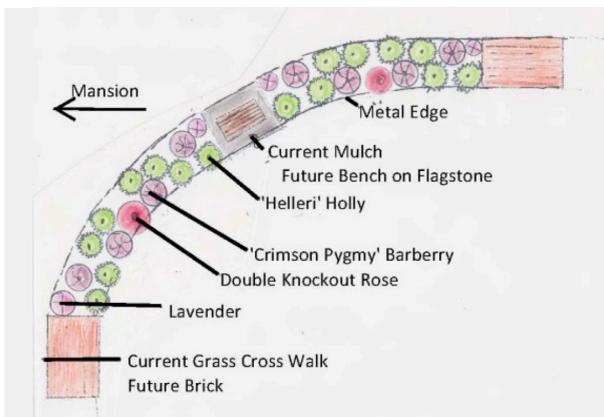


Friends of Oakbourne News

Clock Garden Renovation at Oakbourne Park

by Tom Bare, President, Friends of Oakbourne

One of the design features associated with the mansion at Oakbourne Park is the so-called Clock Garden, which surrounds the flagpole in front of the mansion. This garden is a large circular garden consisting of four quadrants with grass paths at the 12, 3, 6, and 9 o'clock positions. The garden probably got its name because of a sundial that was originally in the space now occupied by the flagpole.



The Clock Garden was planted almost exclusively with peonies - beautiful for a week or two in the spring, but nondescript for the remainder of the year. The Friends of Oakbourne (FoO) have talked about renovating the garden for several years. Thanks to generous financial donations from many people, FoO finally found itself in the position to start planning the renovation of the Clock Garden.

I contacted Craig Rybinski, owner of Creative Garden Solutions in Avondale, PA to assist with the design and planning. I have worked with Craig on many interesting horticultural projects during my years as a Penn State Master Gardener, and knew that he had been involved in the design of a number of gardens associated with historical sites. After meeting several times with FoO, Craig presented us with an overall plan for gardens and walkways, encompassing both the traffic circle in front of the mansion as well as the Clock Garden itself. Financial constraints dictated that we initially restrict ourselves to the Clock Garden renovation.

We established certain horticultural requirements for the Clock Garden:

- Compatible with the architecture and history of the mansion
- Low maintenance once established
- Plants that are hardy and deer resistant
- Four season interest

Craig presented a selection of designs and plants that satisfied the above criteria. The design we settled on (see plant diagram) is a modernized version of a "Knot Garden" (Google "Knot Garden" for examples), where plant textures and colors are woven together to form a pleasing pattern.

The renovated garden will blend nicely with the architectural elements of the mansion, while not being overly formal. Year round interest is created with dwarf evergreen holly (*Ilex crenata* 'Helleri' - Helleri Holly) and dwarf red leaf barberry (*Barberis thunbergii* 'Crimson Pygmy' - Crimson Pygmy Barberry). This layout is then punctuated with pops of color provided by pink Knock Out Roses (*Rosa x Knockout Double Pink*) and clumps of lavender.

The first step in the renovation entailed removal of all plants. On a beautiful day in mid-April, a group of volunteers from FoO and some Westtown garden enthusiasts dug out peonies, daffodil plants/bulbs and a few yuccas; the plants and bulbs all found good homes with Westtown residents and friends.

Rick Brown and I then prepared the beds for planting by rototilling and raking to provide a smooth and level surface. With the guidance and help of Craig and his staff, we then installed metal edging around the perimeter of the four beds. This created a well-defined planting area, and a barrier to keep grass from encroaching into the beds as the garden matures. We then placed a 3-inch layer of mulch on the beds.

On a spectacularly beautiful day in May, Craig and his crew delivered 67 Holly, 34 Crimson Barberry, and 8 Knockout Roses. With their help, our small group of volunteers were able to get the plants into the ground in a little over 2 hours. Mulching first proved to be an excellent decision. The mulch was merely scraped aside where each hole for a plant was dug, and then replaced around the plant after planting was completed.

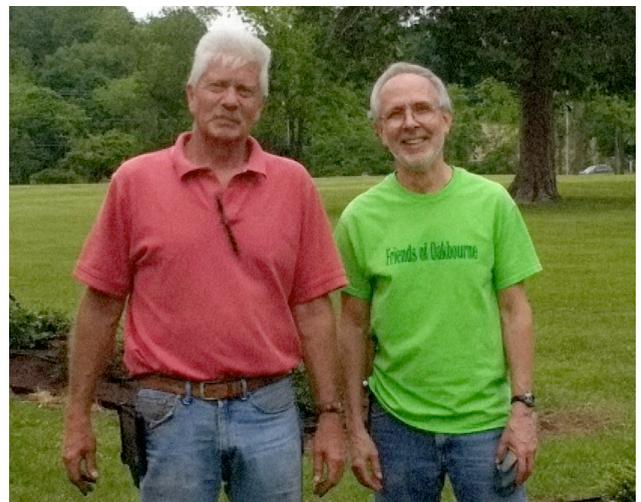


Volunteers planting the Clock Garden beds. Clockwise starting on the left: Ann Bare, Helen Greer, John Capista, Perry Catando, and Rick Brown (John and Perry are Westtown township summer employees)

With all plants in the ground, a soaker hose irrigation system was installed. Each plant was then fertilized with Holly-tone organic fertilizer. Mother Nature was very cooperative with this entire garden project with beautiful weather on all of our workdays and a heavy soaking rain on the day after planting.

Lavender will be planted in the coming weeks, completing the "growing" part of the Clock Garden renovation. Future plans include installing brick walkways between the garden beds, and installing benches on flagstone at the midpoint of each garden quadrant to enhance the aesthetics, and provide a place to relax and enjoy the space.

“As president of the Friends of Oakbourne, I would like to gratefully acknowledge and thank everyone involved in planning and executing this project. In particular, thanks to our small, devoted volunteer group of FoOer’s, and to those who have contributed financially to our organization over the years. A special thanks to Craig Rybinski, who donated his design and contracting services to this project. Westtown’s Director of Public Works, Mark Gross, was especially helpful with his advice and recommendations, as well as providing help with mulching and labor. We’re appreciative of the many Westtown residents who stopped by to help us dig out all of the old plants in the Clock Garden. FoO member Rick Brown deserves special recognition for all of his work at Oakbourne which, at times, seems to be his second home.” — Tom Bare



Craig Rybinski (Creative Garden Solutions) and Tom Bare (President, FoO)

INTERESTED IN IMPROVING YOUR BEAUTIFUL TOWNSHIP PARK?

Please join us at the Friends of Oakbourne’s upcoming meetings at 7:00 pm on July 20 and October 19, 2017 at Oakbourne mansion. Contact Tom Bare (tmbare@hotmail.com or 610-399-1572) if you are interested in donating a park bench or tree to be planted in Oakbourne Park to honor a special person or loved one or to commemorate an important occasion.