

America's Largest Open House

The Virginia spring ritual that is Historic Garden Week

by *Mary Hintermann*



Photo from Leesburg tour courtesy of Catharine Patton.



Photo from Orange County tour courtesy of Catriona Tudor Erler.



hat event was conceived in Charlottesville, has been replicated with great success worldwide, sells over 30,000 tickets each year, and is the largest volunteer project in the Commonwealth? The answer is Historic Garden Week, sponsored by the Garden Club of Virginia.

What started as a two-day fair in 1927 to raise money to preserve Thomas Jefferson's remaining trees at Monticello has grown to 32 tours over eight consecutive days and has had an estimated \$425 million boost on Virginia's economy.

The results of the first economic impacts study for Historic Garden Week have just been released. Chmura Economics and Analytics of Richmond quantified what the 3,400 volunteers who work on Garden Week each year already know: Garden Week is a big deal.

- \$11 million in annual economic impact*
- 30,000 tickets sold to visitors from 30 states*
- \$2 million spent by visitors on food, gas, and hotels*
- \$3.2 million spent by homeowners preparing their properties for tour*
- 80,000 copies of the four-color guidebook are distributed annually*
- 2,000 floral arrangements created using plant materials from local gardens*

Historic Garden Week holds true to its roots as a fundraiser: 48 historically significant gardens have been restored with funds raised by the tours. The Piedmont region is home to seven of these superb restorations: Oatlands in Leesburg, State Arboretum of Virginia, Blandy Experimental Farm in Boyce, Burwell-Morgan Mill in Millwood, The DuPont Gardens at Montpelier, and the University of Virginia and Monticello in Charlottesville. All of these gardens are regularly open to the public.

Thirty-two tours showcasing 200 private homes and public spaces are on tap for the weeklong festival beginning on April 18th. This year, the James River Plantations will make a welcomed return to the itinerary. The six Piedmont tours (located in Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, Leesburg, Morven, Orange, and Warrenton) regularly attract more than 7,000 visitors every year.

See you in the gardens!

For more information: www.gardenweek.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Photo from Albemarle – Charlottesville tour courtesy of Catriona Tudor Eler.



Photo of Carr's Hill in Albemarle County courtesy of Catriona Tudor Eler.



Photo from Orange County tour courtesy of Catriona Tudor Eler.



Photo of Morven in Albemarle County courtesy of the Garden Club of Virginia.

Garden Week in the Piedmont

Saturday, April 18

Orange - Hosted by The Dolley Madison Garden Club

Each venue on this history- and garden-focused tour highlights the evolution of farming and architecture along the Spotswood Trail in Orange County, home to Montpelier, the estate of James Madison. Properties feature late 18th and 19th century properties, replete with period architecture and artifacts, antique furnishings, and significant art collections. Gardens range from boxwood-lined drives to extensive formal parterre gardens and perennial landscapes.

Morven, Charlottesville - Hosted by The Dolley Madison Garden Club

The brick manor house at Morven was built c. 1820 in the late-Georgian/Federal Style. Its 19th century ambience endures, even after 20th century additions and interior renovations. The first floor is open to visitors. The land was part of the original 1730 Carter family land grant and was known to Thomas Jefferson as "Indian Camp." The last private owner, the late John Kluge, endowed the farm to the University of Virginia Foundation in 2001. Grounds feature the formal and cutting gardens renovated by Annette Hoyt Flanders in the 1930s, as well as gardens added by Mr. Kluge. Tulips, pansies, phlox, lilacs, viburnum, deutzia, and other shrubs and perennials fill a series of distinct garden rooms. Notable trees include a pair of Osage orange trees, the state champion Chinese chestnut, and a dove tree. Morven was open for the first Historic Garden Week in 1929.

Wednesday, April 22

Warrenton - Hosted by The Warrenton Garden Club

Conservation and preservation have been central to the Warrenton Garden Club and the Garden Club of Virginia from the beginning. This driving tour of five properties focuses on an area that contained a luxury spa in the 19th century, providing a healthy environment as well as social enjoyment. In the 1960s, the Springs Valley became the focal point for land preservation with the establishment of forceful zoning. The goal was to secure the watershed and prevent construction that jeopardized this basic need of the community. Today, visitors will enjoy the views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the natural beauty of these open spaces that are home to the Warrenton Hunt.

Sunday April 19 & Monday, April 20

Leesburg - Hosted by the Leesburg Garden Club and the Fauquier and Loudoun Garden Club

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Northern tip of Virginia, Leesburg was mapped and recognized by the Council of the Colony in 1758. Two of the town's most charming streets, historic Edwards Ferry Road and Cornwall Street, are within walking distance of town shops and restaurants. Most of the featured tour properties are located there. The neighborhoods offer a variety of architectural styles and well-established gardens. Within driving distance are Oatlands Plantation (a restoration project of the Garden Club of Virginia), Little Oatlands, a Smithsonian Institution Archive Historic American Garden, and Rokeby, where the Declaration of Independence was kept during the burning of Washington in

1812. This two-day Towne and Country tour features 11 properties and coincides with the Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival, which takes place on April 18th and 19th.

Albemarle/Charlottesville - Hosted by The Charlottesville Garden Club, the Rivanna Garden Club, and the Albemarle Garden Club

Visitors will not have to venture far from the Charlottesville city limits to encounter the unique properties on this year's Albemarle-Charlottesville tour. There is something to please everyone, from historic estates to restored Gillette gardens to prized modern landscape architecture. An Albemarle Garden Club member originally owned one home on the tour, and her gardens reflect a lifetime of collecting treasured trees, shrubs, and plants. A private modern home seamlessly relates to the landscape and showcases native and non-native specimens in gloriously colorful, expansive borders and beds. On a grander scale, stately manor homes dating as far back as the mid-19th century capture the essence of refined country living in Central Virginia.

Tuesday, April 21

Fredericksburg - Hosted by The Rappahannock Valley Garden Club

This tour showcases five magnificent properties along the Route 17 corridor between Fredericksburg and Port Royal. Exquisite gardens, renowned architectural design, and stories of Stonewall Jackson are highlights. The tour includes two charming riverfront homes in Port Royal, one of the few original remaining colonial villages along the East Coast, and home to the remarkable events that led to the capture and execution of Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth. This driving tour also features three other historically significant plantations along Route 17 in Caroline County's unspoiled countryside.

