

Demonstration Gardens - What are they and Why have them?

By Susie Granzow, OMG Volunteer

At Kuhefuss House Museum, we want our gardens to be pretty and interesting. But we also hope people will learn something while enjoying the gardens. For example, we show visitors that one kind of plant may have several different varieties or cultivars, and something is bound to suit their taste or planting requirements. It's fine to read up on the plants you are thinking of buying, but nothing can make up your mind faster than actually seeing it growing in a garden. If you can see it from all angles, walk up and touch or smell it, that's when you can make your decision.

We have several kinds of demonstration gardens at Kuhefuss House.

The kitchen garden started as an herb garden, but with the addition of some edible flowers and a few vegetables, we decided to rename it. Herbs were grown for culinary use, medicinal properties, dyes to color fabrics, or a combination of two or more of these categories. We want to show that many would also look very good in a flower garden setting.

We have more than one variety or cultivar of some plants. For instance, there are different kinds of sage. The typical sage has gray-green leaves and forms a low, dense, flat-topped bush. Some sages have greener leaves. My favorite is pineapple sage. It really does smell like pineapple when you squeeze its leaves. It also has the bonus of bright red tubular flowers late in the season (Aug-Sept) which attract hummingbirds. Its only drawback is that it is an annual in our climate, whereas many of the sages are perennial here.

Thyme, sorrel, and lavender are other plants we have in more than one variety. There are two

sorrels in the Kuhefuss garden; one is tall and green, the other is short with burgundy stems and veining on the leaves (also called Bloody Dock). This one turns copper color in fall. We have winter thyme which is a short plant, but the wooly thyme is a gray ground cover which is less than one inch tall. You can also get thymes in different flavors like lime and lemon.

Hellebores - Along the north side of the house, we planted eight kinds of hellebores. The plants are small now and will take 4-5 years to grow to their mature size. They will range from 12-18 inches high and 18-24 inches in diameter, depending on the variety. The foliage is very sturdy and remains green most of the year. Hellebore flowers on the older varieties are pendulous (hanging down or downward facing), but many new cultivars have upward facing flowers.

Hellebores do well in part to full shade, and are also deer- and rabbit-resistant. Bloom times vary. The 'Cinnamon Snow' hellebore (below) had buds the week of Thanksgiving. In February the entire planting bed was encased in ice, but when the ice melted, the flowers bloomed in March! The flower color ranges from cream to cinnamon. Some of the other hellebore varieties are rose or yellow, and will bloom in March-April, others in April-May. Flowers usually stay on the plant a long time, so I'm looking forward to seeing what these new plants do.



Hydrangeas are also part of our demonstration gardens. We started a revamp of the bed on the

south border by replacing lilacs with three large, shade-loving hydrangeas; they will be the "bones" of this bed. Since this property already has a tree hydrangea and bushes of big white mopheads (along the fence in the west border), I chose 'Twist N Shout' for pink lacecap flower heads in this new location.



The rose bed features a variety of rose, pink and white flowers. There are hearty old-fashioned shrub roses and a few of the more delicate bushes. The newest is a white Calatrava rose planted two years ago. Although we deadhead to keep things blooming through the summer, we also leave some flowers, so there will be rosehips for fall interest.

Plans for possible future demonstration gardens include a small fern and moss garden, and maybe a rock garden.

And finally, we "demonstrate" sustainability. Last summer we built a compost bin. We built the bin - and use it - to encourage people to compost their yard waste and make use of the finished compost to feed their plants.

We hope that visitors explore and enjoy the Kuhefuss gardens in Cedarburg, and pick up some new ideas from our demonstration efforts.

Hydrangea photo courtesy
www.acornfarm.com