

The Gardens of the Ramble

Passion, Opportunity and Time evolve a woodland garden

By Dave Dunn

Over a quarter of a century, the gardens at the Ramble have evolved in response to stimulate and opportunity. Experimentation with the shady acid conditions led to a love of Japanese maple, Magnolia, Azalea and Rhododendrons. Deep shade led to a passion for Hosta, Ferns, Astilbe, and just about anything else that would grow in moist shady locations.



The big idea of the Ramble was sparked by two things - a long term dream to share our gardening experiences with other gardeners and collectors, and the spectacular impact of the ice storm of 1998. I have said it was like the hand of God coming down and clearing a swath of land that had originally been a mature stand of Red Pine. The clean up in 1999 sparked the idea of making use of this sudden creation of open land in the center of the woodland, The Ramble rose like a “Phoenix from the ashes of the storm”, and the idea of the Ramble was truly born.

The gardens at Rideau Woodland Ramble are the result of 25 years of evolution, experimentation and discovery. They fall into several main zones, almost all in some context of shade and woodland.

1. The first gardens enjoy the dappled light provided by a stand of red pine. They can be found on either side of the home on the property. This acidic area is the home of Japanese maples, Rhododendrons, Azaleas, and a range of trees, shrubs and perennials. Many are surprised by what thrives in this environment.

2. The second area is home to a babbling pond, a collection of dwarf conifers, specimen Hostas, and grasses, as well as a further range of trees shrubs and perennials.

3. The third major area is known as Lake Ramble, a pond home to much wildlife. A large garden of conifers anchors this area, along with a large grass demonstration bed.

4. The next major zone included is called Totem Trail as it rambles into the pure woodland and some of the surprises contained therein.

5. Finally, in 2005 saw the opening up of the new northern zone at the Ramble, with initial plantings down Chanticleer Lane.



All of these gardens are interconnected with trails and walkways and are carefully planted to exhibit, both structure, and the “bones” that hold them together, succession planting to assure interest from first melt to first snow, and even interest thereafter.

The gardens are home to many collections, but the biggest is the Hosta collection of hundreds of mature specimens. They have to be seen to be believed....but ranges from the worlds biggest to the worlds smallest Hostas!



So as you can see, developing a garden is as much about experimentation, accident, and opportunity as it is vision and planning.

Dream big, take chances and go with your passion as you develop yours!

Dave Dunn