

Alexandria Garden Walking Tour 2021

Overview

- This tour explores some of Alexandria's community gardens, butterfly gardens, demonstration gardens, and other types of public gardens.
- Please note that this is just a sampling of the many fine public gardens in Alexandria.
- The route is about 3 miles long, with stops at six gardens or parks.
- Go to <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/35666422> for cuesheets or turn-by-turn directions.

1. Simpson Gardens, near the YMCA at 420 E. Monroe Avenue

Starting point: in the gardens.

Members of Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia have developed and maintained six demonstration gardens in Arlington and Alexandria, VA. In each of these gardens, the community can see first hand the types of plants that grow well in our area, learn recommended planting practices, and enjoy the gardens' unique beauty.

The Simpson Gardens actually consist of 5 unique gardens, each created to demonstrate a different type of theme:

- Flagstone Garden – designed to show locally available types of flagstone and other materials that homeowners can use for paths and patios.
- Waterwise Garden – demonstrates that a low maintenance garden in an exposed, dry area can host a rich variety of plants and be attractive year-round. A numbered plant list is available on site for visitors to provide for a self guided tour.
- Tufa Garden – features plants suitable for rock gardens in the region. The tufa (porous limestone rock) was a gift from the United States Botanic Garden in Washington D.C.
- Scented Garden – focuses on plants with fragrant flowers or aromatic foliage. Visit on a warm sunny day to savor the rich aromas.
- Butterfly Garden – designed to provide food and protection for all stages of butterfly development, from larva, to the adult butterfly. At times, this garden may appear unkempt and full of weeds. However, many plants which are considered weeds in other gardens are in fact important host plants for many butterfly species.



Sources: <https://mgmv.org/demonstration-gardens-2/>; <https://mgmv.org/demonstration-gardens-2/simpson-gardens/>.

Start your walk at the flagstone garden and the waterwise garden, at the south end of the YMCA parking lot, near E. Monroe Avenue. Then head north through the YMCA parking lot to see the other themed gardens, at the north end of the parking lot. Continue north, past the playground. Turn left on E. Duncan Avenue, then right onto Dewitt Avenue. There's a block of Dewitt that doesn't have a sidewalk, so you'll want to use the westside sidewalk. Turn left onto E. Howell Avenue. Cross Mt. Vernon Avenue at the

traffic light and continue on E. Howell Avenue. Turn right onto Clyde Avenue, then turn left onto E. Uhler Avenue. Turn right onto Commonwealth Avenue, staying on the eastside sidewalk. Continue past the Duncan Library, then stop in the garden on the north side of the library.

2. Butterfly Garden at Duncan Branch Library, 2501 Commonwealth Avenue

Stopping point: in the garden.

Two volunteers, Veneeta Anand and Sue Tate, helped plan the Duncan Library's Butterfly Garden.

In Veneeta's words:

Several years ago, I discovered the Wings of Fancy exhibit of live butterflies at the Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, Maryland. As an amateur nature photographer, I loved watching and photographing the butterflies there for hours every summer.



So, when a neighbor encouraged residents of the Rosemont/Del Ray/Beverly Hills to plant Swamp Milkweed seedlings to support the dwindling population of Monarch butterflies, how could I say no?

That was back in 2007. After a few years, the Monarch Waystation in my Rosemont home grew to the point where I was giving away dozens of milkweed seedlings to neighbors every spring and summer. I learned to identify the Monarch eggs and caterpillars on the Milkweed in my garden, and rear Monarchs indoors and then release them to journey south to Mexico. [In 2014], I raised more than 25 Monarchs on my "Monarch nursery" in bug cages on my dining table.

I looked for areas in the neighborhood that would be ideal for creating a large Monarch Waystation and also attract the attention of the public. [I talked with Sue Tate, a friend and fellow gardener] about the possibility of creating a Monarch Waystation in the Duncan Library garden. Sue knew Elaina Palinscar, who helped develop the existing garden at the library. Elaina was keen on the idea and said she would seek the board's approval.

That was in February [2015]. Today, that dream has become a reality. The new pollinator garden on the north end of the library is filling up with Swamp and Common Milkweed, and dozens of other plants that will attract other butterflies, bees and birds. The garden would not have happened without Elaina and Sue's hard work. We hope that in time the library will offer workshops, classes and information about Monarchs that will encourage others in the neighborhood to create their own Monarch Waystations.

Source: <http://www.friendsofduncanlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Summer-2015-Newsletter.pdf>.

Continue north on Commonwealth Avenue, staying on the eastside sidewalk. Just before the traffic light at the intersection of Commonwealth Avenue and Mt. Vernon Avenue, stop at the Nancy & Jim Dunning Memorial Garden on your right.

3. Nancy & Jim Dunning Memorial Garden, 2801 Commonwealth Avenue

Starting point: in the garden.



Nancy Dunning was given the nickname the “Queen of Del Ray” for her involvement in the community. She was a real estate agent who brought new businesses to the neighborhood under her vision for Mount Vernon Avenue. Her efforts in organizing arts festivals and other events helped turn Del Ray into the vibrant, artistic neighborhood it is today. She was married to then-Sheriff James Dunning. On Dec. 5, 2003, Dunning failed to show up for a lunch date with her husband and son. The

Dunnings returned home, where they found her on the floor, shot to death. There were no signs of forced entry and no suspects, and the case went cold for over ten years.

In May 2017, a jury convicted Charles Severance for the murder of Dunning and two other prominent Alexandria residents. All three victims were fatally shot in their own homes over the course of a more than a decade. Prosecutors said Severance harbored a grudge against people who he perceived to be the city's elite after losing a custody battle over his son. He has a history of erratic behavior and also ran for mayor twice.

The current memorial garden is near the former Colasanto Pool, which has been closed since 2010. The area is being redeveloped into a nicer memorial garden and spray park. The garden will be a peaceful place to reflect and will include new paving and seating. In 2018, the total project cost was estimated at \$418,452 for the garden and \$900,000 for the spray park. Local community organizations and businesses raised most of the money, and they also obtained a matching grant from the City.

Sources: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/alexandria-police-still-trying-to-solve-slaying-of-nancy-dunning-sheriffs-wife/2013/12/04/eda977a0-5cfa-11e3-be07-006c776266ed_story.html; <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/charles-severance-alexandria-murders-verdict-nancy-dunning-ron-kirby-ruthanne-lodato/1978910/>; <https://patch.com/virginia/delray/splash-park-nancy-dunning-memorial-proposed-del-ray-icymi>.

Continue north on Commonwealth Avenue. Turn left onto W. Reed Avenue and take the northside sidewalk. Turn right and use the path that runs along the west side of the Chick Armstrong Community Center. Turn left onto Dale Street. Stop at the Dale Street Community Garden on your right.

4. Dale Street Community Garden, 65 Dale Street

Stopping point: in the garden.

Located in the Arlandria neighborhood of Alexandria, Dale Street Community Gardens (DSCG) opened in 2018, and offers 42 raised beds for rent along with communal space for demonstration gardens and horticulture education. There are three sizes of raised beds available. Membership priority is given to neighborhood residents within a .50 mile radius of the garden.



DSCG is governed by a volunteer garden board in partnership with the City of Alexandria. The mission of the DSCG is to support and enhance the social capital, food security, and health of the local community through gardening. A portion of food grown in the garden is donated to local food banks.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/CommunityGardens>.

Make a u-turn and retrace your steps on Dale Street. Turn right onto the path that runs along the west side of the Chick Armstrong Community Center. Turn left onto W. Reed Avenue. Turn left into Shirley Tyler Unity Park, at the southwest corner of W. Reed Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue.

5. Shirley Tyler Unity Park, 3550 Commonwealth Avenue

Stopping point: in the park.

This 0.58-acre site used to be a Dominion Power substation. The City purchased the property in 2009 but didn't really have a plan for it, and the site was left untended for years. In October 2011, neighborhood volunteers teamed with City staff to forge ahead even in the face of economic troubles and budget crises. Neighbors donated plants from their own gardens and used mulch ground up from cut-down, unhealthy, storm-battered trees formerly used to screen the old substation. They installed two gardens, a walking path, shade trees, and park benches. For just \$200, it started to resemble a park.



Noticing the community support, Dominion Power stepped up to assist. The City also matched the Dominion dollar contribution with additional plantings. All in all, 4 new maples, 3 crepe myrtles, and 12 arborvitae made the community gardening project into a bona fide pocket park. Students from the adjacent Cora Kelly School also helped fix up the gardens and plant more trees.

In 2016, the City completed the Neighborhood Parks

Improvement Plan that included a concept for the park, building upon the volunteer efforts, with a plaza and game tables, a tricycle track and picnic area. In September 2016, Rebuilding Together Alexandria hired landscape architecture firm Rhodeside and Harwell to develop a design for the site, based on the Neighborhood Parks Improvement Plan. After a community meeting in October 2017 to present a draft concept for the park and collect feedback on what the neighborhood wanted, park construction occurred in summer-fall 2018.

Sources: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/recreation/info/default.aspx?id=100128>;
<http://www.arlandria.org/2018/01/a-plan-for-commonwealth-park.html>.

Exit the park and head south on Commonwealth Avenue, using the westside sidewalk. At Ashby Street, use the crosswalk to cross Commonwealth Avenue, then turn right and take the Mt. Jefferson Park Trail. Continue on the Mt. Jefferson Park Trail until just past Hume Avenue, then stop at the Mt. Jefferson Traffic Garden on your left.

6. Mt. Jefferson Traffic Garden, 207 Hume Avenue

Stopping point: in the traffic garden

Traffic gardens are miniature street neighborhoods made up of small-sized streets where children and adults can engage in active learning about roadways and traffic safety in a low-stress environment. Children practice walking, bicycling, and “driving” along roadways and through intersections and crossings, all in an environment free of motor vehicles.



In March 2019, the City hosted a community workshop where local children were invited to become the traffic engineers and design their own traffic garden. After careful review, City staff combined the work of three neighborhood girls as inspiration for the final design of the Mt. Jefferson Traffic Garden. Special thanks to Lucy, Maisie, and Alli for their design expertise! The design was painted and ready for kids to start using it in Summer 2019.

At the official opening event in November 2019, kids were led through a bicycle rodeo course and practiced key skills, such as starting and stopping, turning, and using hand signals. Bicycle and helmet checks were provided, and residents spoke with City staff about other exciting Vision Zero efforts.

Source: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/tes/info/default.aspx?id=117224>.

Continue southeast on the Mt. Jefferson Park Trail, which will turn into a natural-surface trail. Turn right toward Stewart Avenue, then turn left onto Leslie Avenue. Turn right onto E. Duncan Avenue, then turn left toward Leslie Avenue, taking the path that runs alongside the playground. The path will take you back to the YMCA parking lot, where you began the walk.