



ontario gardener

For the passionate gardener

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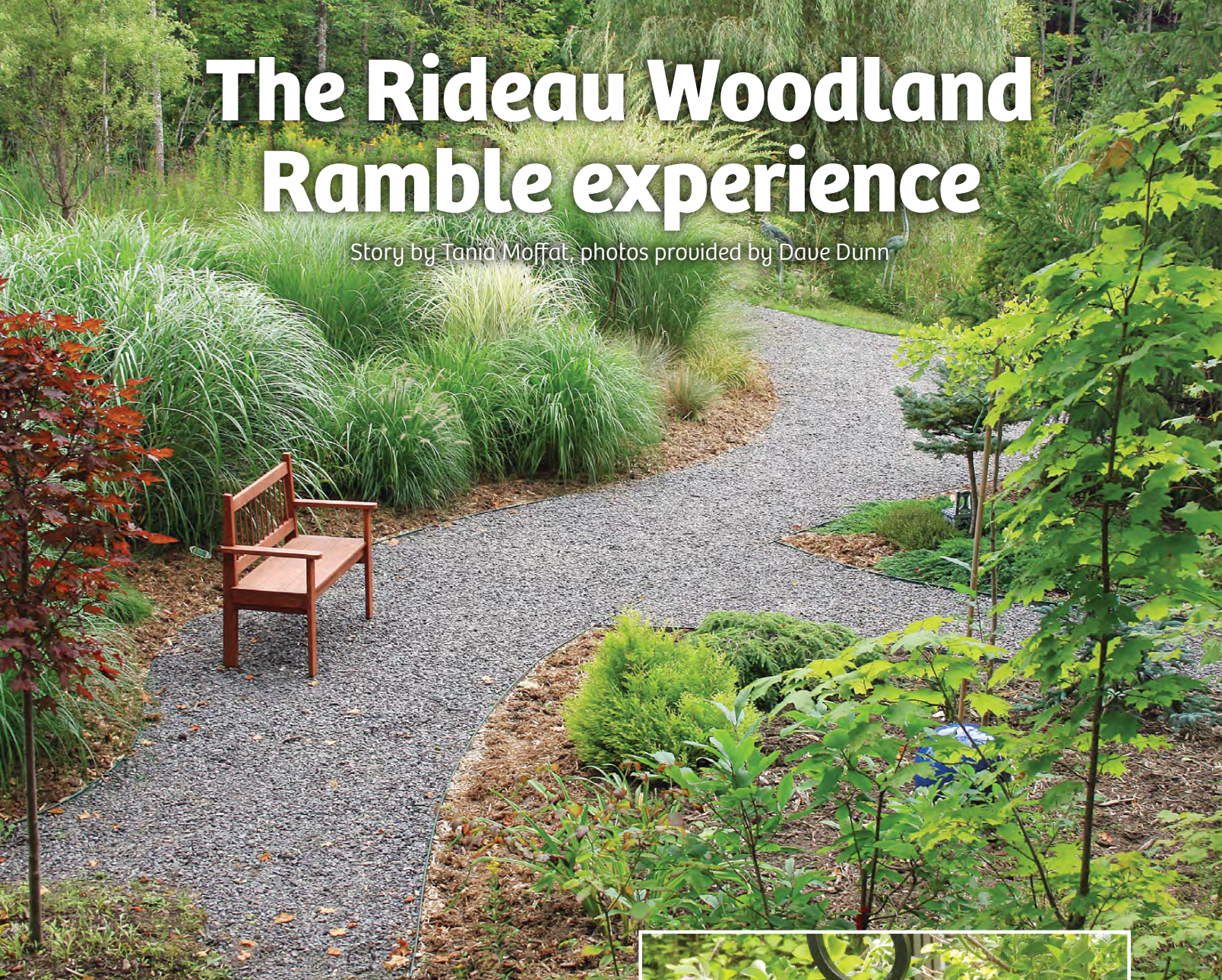
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The Rideau Woodland Ramble experience

Story by Tania Moffat, photos provided by Dave Dunn



Wander through a wooded wonderland.

Nothing on earth is more invigorating and magical than nature. It has the ability to transport us from the ordinary world into a mystical place, where we can truly appreciate the gift of Mother Earth and let our spirits soar. Rideau Woodland Ramble is a garden experience unlike any other. It will capture your heart and soothe your soul; it's no wonder that people return here year after year.

The concept of the public garden was always a dream of Rob Caron's. A horticulturist by trade, he and partner Dave Dunn spent many years collecting rare plants and developing the gardens. In 1998 the massive ice storm that hit eastern Ontario and Quebec devastated the gardens. "It basically tore out two acres of forest – it looked like a bomb had gone off," says Dave of the destruction. Up until that time Rob and Dave had been extending and evolving their gardens. The storm, though damaging, provided them with a huge opportunity to use what they had created and evolve it in an unusual way. It was here, in the clearing, where the idea of the Ramble was truly born. Much of the clean-up



Sign points to a unique experience.

and infrastructure was created between 1999 and 2000 culminating with the official opening in the fall of 2000.

The Ramble is located approximately 45 minutes south of Ottawa via Highway 43, in Merrickville. The gardens are off the beaten path so to speak, but have become a yearly destination for many. Over half of their visitors come to tour the gardens. From garden clubs, senior bus tours and other groups on day trips – people come



You can walk along one of many rambling pathways mapped out by Rob and Dave, and if you're inspired by what you see, you can likely buy it.

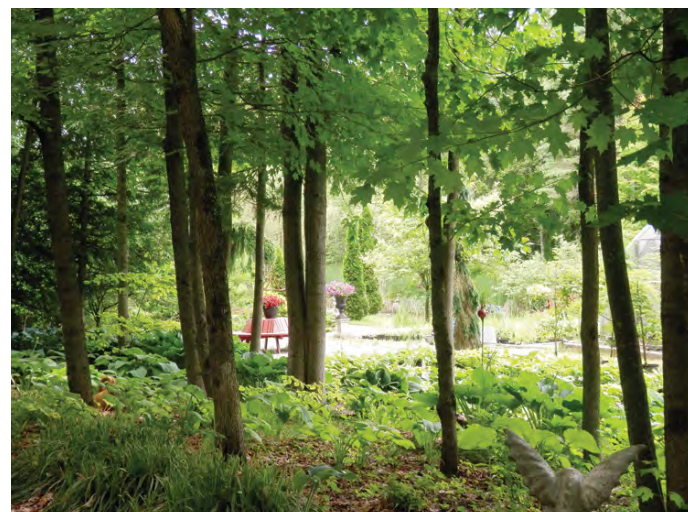


Smaller trails bring you closer to nature.

If you find yourself worrying, go outside, take three breaths, address a tree and quietly say, 'Thank you.' If you can't find a tree, a dandelion will do... nature is magic.
— Robert Bateman



Rob and Dave have created a true garden haven.



The gardens show just how much you can do with shade.



Peaceful beauty by a shaded pond.



The pond area was borne from the destruction of the ice storm,

from all over eastern Ontario and even the Maritimes to wander through the seven acres. The woodland is filled with unusual gardens and lushly lined interconnected trails winding throughout their property. There has never been a charge to view the gardens, “that wasn’t the idea; to become a botanical garden,” says Dave.

Another thing the Ramble attracts is a lot of collectors. Tucked into the middle of this sanctuary is a garden centre that specializes in experimental and rare plants. Don’t expect to find garden knick-knacks, the store only sells plants, and that is because Rob and Dave want visitors to have a garden experience, not a commercial experience. In fact, plants are displayed in a manner to highlight colour and texture, contrasts and impact, as opposed to alphabetical location, supporting the learning experience for its visitors. All of the gardens and trails connect back to the Centre.

Dave, an architect by trade is also a passionate painter. Trained by none other than the Robert Bateman in high school, his works feature gardens and wildlife. Visitors will find his works in a small gallery in the heart of the nursery. The Pavilion is located just behind the gazebo, tucked into the woods.

The gardens and plantings have a definite character to them, almost a Tom Thompson style. Interesting specimens of conifers in every shape, colour, form and scale abound. Red tip Norway spruce sport a velvety red colour in spring, turning brown then green as the season progresses, while Max gold offers a contrasting canary yellow. Several of the specimens of



You can find a conifer to solve just about any problem and add beauty to any space..



The most striking feature of hostas are the dramatic range of colour variation, and leaf type. They range through greens, blues, gold and variegated forms. With puckered, wrinkled, shiny, smooth or heavily veined leaves.



Experimentation with shade and acidic soil conditions led to a love of Japanese maple.



The beautiful and rare fringe tree.



Rhododendrons also love acidic soil..



Magnolias in full bloom.

hostas and conifers that you see here you will not likely find anywhere else. And while you can buy many of these rarities here, they are still hard to come by. People gather and wait for the trucks to unload when orders arrive hoping to get one of the hard to find specimens, like the fringe trees which smell like jasmine, or one of the variegated forms of the Devil's walking stick. "The rare trees get our customers excited and since the gardens are over 30 years old people can actually see many of them in situ," says Dave.

Under a canopy of red pines is the oldest part of the garden. They began with a collection of hostas, ferns and conifers. The acidic soil pleases the Japanese and Korean maples, rhododendrons, azaleas, and a range of other trees, shrubs and perennials. The garden provides visitors with a good sense of what to plant under pine trees, and how amazing hostas can look after 30 years.

On the opposite side of the house, another woodland garden awaits under mostly maple trees. Trails meander through the property transitioning between garden, woodland and water features. The pond is designed in a yin/yang fashion, half planted in a linear structure and half left to the hands of Mother Nature – both are spectacular. A huge conifer collection uses colour, form and texture to create a unique look and is stunning against the backdrop of the forest wall. If you stop to relax, you can listen to the sound of the fountain and feed the Koi. The pond provides a home for several members of the local wildlife. Tall grasses, some reaching 15 feet,



Situated south of Ottawa near the Rideau River, this plant nursery is nestled in the heart of a public garden.



They stock about 300 different types of hostas and 100 kinds of rare conifers.



Many rare and exotic plant species have been gathered over the years.



The garden centre is tucked away in the middle of the sanctuary.



Dave's artwork is for sale and on display in The Pavilion.



A large collection of art can be found throughout the gardens, these are pieces Rob and Dave have collected over the years.

display how these often neglected plants can spruce up properties. Statues and art work can be found throughout the property.

Chanticleer Lane is lined with dramatic plantings of pears, specimen plants and mass plantings of hostas. The other lane is Forsythia Way which is lined with a mixture of fruiting shrubs and forsythia.

Rideau Woodland Ramble is an experience like no other – you won't want to miss it. ♻️



**CANADIAN
Garden Centre
Destination
of the Year**

"It blew us off our feet. We were dumbfounded. It was our 15th year and it was a huge validation for us. That we had succeeded in creating a gardening experience. It felt so good and we are still excited about it," says Dave of their award.

Half of the pond garden is manicured while the other half is left to naturalize.

