

RARE TREAT

**Brooksville gardeners open
their gates for charity**

PHOTOS BY LYNN KARLIN

GARDEN WRITERS Eliot Coleman and Barbara Damrosch have traveled the world to speak to the masses more times than they could ever remember. The narrow road back to their tiny hamlet of Harborside in the town of Brooksville has always been a quiet, solitary retreat.

For one historic day in the summer of 2000, that will all change. Ten families have banded together to host the town's

first ever garden tour July 22, with all proceeds benefiting the local library.

"Eliot's already nervous about it," said Damrosch, his wife of nine years. "He's wondering where everyone will park."

In what may qualify as the most exceptional tour in a New England summer packed with events from May to August, the Brooksville tour is notable for far more than the opportunity to peek through Coleman and Damrosch's garden gate.

Avid readers and researchers, Barbara Damrosch and Eliot Coleman are helping raise money for the local library.

All 10 gardens on the tour feature unique, expansive displays, and all either view the ocean or are within easy walking distance of the shore.

The area's idyllic natural landscape, with its rocky beaches and panoramic vistas of Penobscot Bay, is what lured the area's most famous homesteaders, Helen and Scott





Nearing, in the 1950s. Their legacy, The Good Life Center, will be included in the Brooksville tour, along with the home of Abbie McMillen, one of the founders of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. Wildflower expert Heather McCargo has also joined in, as well as noted landscape architect Allen Abrahamson.

“It’s just a remarkable group of people who live and garden in this area,” said Marilyn Rutland, whose own prodigious garden will also be on the tour. “I see many of these homes quite often and I’m still in awe each time. This truly is one of the most beautiful places on earth.”

IN RUTLAND’S WORDS, here is a rundown of just a few of the highlights visitors can expect to see at the following homes:

Barbara Damrosch and Eliot Coleman — As you come through the iron gate, you immediately know you’re entering a special place that professional gardeners have created for themselves. Every element — the small summer guest cottage, the tool shed, the badminton court on the front lawn, the wood-fired sauna with its rope swing into the pond, the greenhouse attached to the kitchen, the intensively planted vegetable garden, the lush perennial beds, the easily accessible fruit — is planned to offer the most enjoyment, convenience, and fun from this unique farm. When you consider that in 1991, the entire site (continued on page 118)



Forest Farm, the last homestead of Helen and Scott Nearing, has been preserved as the Good Life Center — which has been maintained organically by stewards Jen Jones and Jake Kennedy.

Harborside (continued from page 23)

was an empty field, reclaimed from the forest, the transformation is all the more remarkable and inspiring. Near the home site is their famed commercial growing area that produces crops from October through May.

Heather McCargo and Brian McNiff — Heather McCargo tended her first garden at age 5; with degrees in plant biology and landscape architecture, her present garden reflects both this formal training and a philosophy that gardens should be functional, organic, an extension of what is naturally there, and chosen to attract wildlife. Throughout these gardens you'll see a dependence on native plants and the integration of plants and living spaces. McCargo, the former head propagator at the New England Wild Flower Society's Garden in the Woods in Framingham, Mass., sees herself as a "plant midwife," and has patiently propagated all the plants in the garden herself from seed or cuttings. No hybrids allowed. Traces of an old farm remain — the barn, the orchard, and the meadow and pond on the south side of the house.

Michael and Abbie McMillen — This abandoned farm site has been restored to productivity by Mrs. McMillen, one of the founders of MOFGA. Not surprisingly, this organic philosophy governs the massive gardens and expansive landscaping, all owner designed. Traces of the original farm's history have been preserved, including a cellar hole, wells, and footings of a 19th century barn. The drive, circling a lawn of fruit trees, is stone edged and banked with cotoneaster, daylilies and pines. Japanese tree lilacs and rhododendrons frame the entrance. Follow the winding path through the maze of perennials or the woolly-thyme walk to the grassy square, the restored cellar hole, and the house's shade beds. Set against delphinium, daylilies, small evergreens and many perennials, the cellar hosts a picnic/play area and is edged with sedums, lady's mantle and a special mystery rose, originally planted in the 1800s.

Good Life Center — With a tranquil and ever-fascinating view of Orrs Cove, which Helen Nearing liked to call "Spirit Cove," the stone homestead of the Nearings has for decades been a magnet for those seeking a simpler life in harmony with nature. You can peer over the impressive hand-built stonewall which surrounds the 50-foot-square garden. Designed to maximize production, the garden is intensively and organically cultivated, and contains strawberries and asparagus in addition to annual vegetables. Behind the walled garden stands a neat row of compost piles, each surrounded by logs, in a design that is widely copied for its practicality and low cost.


John and Jean Eysenbach — Without question, this garden's unique distinction is the amazing ocean view, west across Smith Cove and Indian Bar to Castine and Penobscot Bay. Every design decision — siting the house and the stonewalls, terracing the

perennial beds — was based on enjoying that view. When you can tear yourself away, begin your stroll through the gardens, totally designed, created, and maintained by these hands-on owners. Before you leave, enjoy the sculpture, on loan from Susan Chase, a local artist. Passing along his hard-earned wisdom, the owner recommends that your quarry or stone source is uphill from your wall's construction site!

Sue Ash and Ed Fox — Perched at the head of Cape Rosier, the garden follows the granite curves and hollows of the land, tiered into three levels. Enter through the stone and iron gate, and follow the path through the conifer garden, down the steps, and through the pergolas. At the Corn Maiden sculpture, the path divides into five branches, with the woodlands garden — carpeted with primroses, trillium, and lady's slipper on the right, and the hot garden — ablaze with dense oranges, yellows, reds, and purples on your left. And that is just the beginning.

Elaine and Wayne Brenner — Enormous granite steps and boulders shape this ocean-side garden, designed and installed by David Eaton at Maine Stone and Landscape. Stone was used to create individual "rooms" to view the water, the Camden Hills, and the rugged shoreline. While more than 100 tons of additional stone were brought on site, the framework was provided by nature: massive outcroppings, ledges and giant boulders, such as the prominent Whale Rock, on the western-facing shore.

Allen and Pam Abrahamson — What do a professional landscape architect and his wife choose for their own home? Well, in this case, a most challenging project — a set of farm buildings dating back to 1843 that had experienced decades of "deferred maintenance." But the house had great lines with a well-drained, south-facing site, and land that offered unlimited potential: huge, old trees and a wide, sweeping field leading to the shores of the Bagaduce River. The planting beds function as experiment stations for unusual plants such as *Heptacodium*, the Chinese 'Seven Son' flower.

Jim and Alice Madix — From the road, the landscaping has the typical simple, spare look of an extremely well-maintained historic farmhouse, which is exactly what it is. But step around to the back yard and you will discover the most charming feature — a 16-by-16-foot, one-room, rustic playhouse, complete with a porch, recycled windows and window boxes! Built four years ago for the delight of now 8-year-old granddaughter, Grace Jackson, the story house retreat is surrounded by flowers and vegetables that are Grace's favorites: sweet peas, sunflowers, annual phlox, carrots, string beans, with trailing nasturtiums in the window boxes, providing heat-resistant decoration as well as spicy salad ingredients. Ever-bearing raspberries are nearby for immediate devouring. 

A Summer in the Garden

The gardeners of Brooksville, Maine,

have banded together for the

community's first-ever garden tour,

July 22. This just one of more than

60 tours tracked down by PPP

associate editor, Lelah Cole.

For more information, turn to the

listings beginning on page 24.