



YACHATS, OREGON

The Gerdemann Garden

Close to Nature

Dr. Jim and Janis Gerdemann found the perfect area in the country to retire and create their dream garden: a 3.5-acre piece of property north of Yachats, Oregon, facing the Pacific Ocean and adjacent to the Siuslaw National Forest. Today, some twenty-five years later, the Gerdemann Garden is a woodland garden created in a coastal forest that retains as much as possible of the original vegetation and character of the forest. However, Yachats has become a high-end residential area, and the Gerdemann property could be subdivided into 5 or more residential lots, destroying the garden and its rare plants. The Gerdemanns (now in their 80s) and their friends, including View the Future (a non-profit conservation organization), want to establish an irrevocable easement to preserve access to the garden for the public's enjoyment and education. Future considerations also may include requesting donations and/or attracting a compatible nonprofit organization that might be able to help offset maintenance costs.

HISTORY

Jim Gerdemann is a retired botanist and Professor Emeritus of the University of Illinois, and Janice Gerdemann is a retired teacher: both have a life-long passion with gardening. In the 1970s they bought land near Yachats, OR, on the lower slope of Green Mountain where good cold air drainage help to provide a mild microclimate in which to raise and experiment with a wide variety of native and non-native species. A spring and small stream provide enhanced beauty and interest throughout



the year. The site is home to a wide variety of wildlife. Black-tail deer, North American Elk, raccoon, black bear, cougar, coyotes and one bobcat have visited. The rare Giant Pacific Salamander (7 to 8 inch long) has been sighted three times. The property boasts a wide variety of birds, including wrens, hummingbirds, warblers (five species), kinglets, chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers (including the pileated), and raptors. The Gerdemann Garden is now twenty-five years old.

Although a few trees were removed to provide adequate sunlight, most of the trunks and limbs were left in place to decay and provide “nurse logs,” as in a natural forest. Invasive exotics such as blackberry, broom and English Ivy are not tolerated. All of the native flowers, such as Trillium, Iris, Viola, Columbine, Erythronium, Camas, Bleeding Heart, Western Lily and others are encouraged.

The original plantings were mainly Rhododendrons with a concentration on species and hybrids that are not commonly cultivated in Oregon . Many of these are borderline in hardiness, such as species of *Maddenia*, *Arboria*, *Grandia*, *Falconera*, and *Vireya*. Gerdemann also has planted some older and seldom-obtainable English Rhododendron hybrids. In addition, he has hybridized and named several new plants, including the series of semi-hardy *Vireyas* that he calls “Tropic Alpines” and that can be grown out of doors in many coastal areas.

Gerdemann also has planted species not typically grown in Oregon, such as the New Zealand tree ferns; protoaceae such as Australian *Grevillia* and the Chilean flame tree; and the Chilean Lantern Tree. He has included other Southern Hemisphere species throughout the garden. Presently, he is evaluating several palm tree species. Because of the garden’s good microclimate, Dr. Gerdemann has been able to grow many plants of borderline hardiness (including, for example, most *Maddenia* and a few *Vireyas*) without protection.

In fact, Gerdemann’s experiments with non-native species gives other gardeners knowledge about what plants will thrive in the Pacific Maritime climate and soils. Furthermore, they have done this while maintaining all the native species in their almost four acres, giving special attention to planting around fallen trees and other natural features. Essentially they worked with the land instead of imposing a pre-conceived design on it. Many of their flourishing experiments now grace others’ gardens. Today, the Gerdemann Garden contains approximately 60 native species, 266 rhododendron species, over 350 hybrids, 424 species of trees and shrubs, and many perennials.

Many species are represented by more than one form. For example, there are 21 forms of *Rhododendron arboreum*.

Most importantly, from its inception, the Gerdemanns have always shared their garden with others. They have hosted countless organized tours, including garden clubs, naturalist groups, master gardeners, botanical specialists and tourists from all over the world, including China, India, Korea, England, New Zealand, Sweden, Iceland, and Italy - and many of their flourishing experiments now grace others’ gardens.

THE THREAT

Time is the threat to this magnificent and unique garden. Dr. Jim and Janice Gerdemann are 84 and 80 years old, respectively, and in declining health. Yachats area has become a popular residential area, and home sites are selling at premium prices. Upon their deaths, the Gerdemann garden could be subdivided into 5 or more residential lots. Unfortunately, their three children do not live nearby and will neither be able to maintain nor to keep the garden. If residential development occurs, Gerdemann Garden and its rare plants will be destroyed. Thus the Gerdemanns are seeking to establish an irrevocable easement to preserve access to the garden for the public’s enjoyment and education. Even though no fees have ever been charged to visit this garden, a future consideration is to ask for donations and/or find a compatible nonprofit organization that would be able to help offset maintenance costs.



HOW TO HELP

The Gerdemanns welcome ideas from the public and garden conservation groups as to how to save their garden for the enjoyment of generations to come. Please contact them at the following address.

Site Address

The Gerdemann Garden

P. O. Box 391

Yachats OR 97498

tel. 541-547-3544

gerdych@casco.net