



WELLFIELD
BOTANIC GARDENS

Story of the Gardens



A Docent Guide

Your local homegrown, World-Class Garden.

Legend:

- AG - Annual Garden
AP - Adventure Path
BG - Bridge Garden
CG - Conversation Garden
CHG - Children's Garden
CLC - Celebration Garden
COT - Cottage
CR - Council Ring
ECC - English Cottage Garden
EG - Event Garden
ELG - Elk Garden
EP - Event Plaza
IG - Island Garden
LCG - Lotus Creek Garden
PAV - Pavilion
PGC - Peace Garden
PG - Pergola Garden
SG - Sensory Garden
SPG - Spring Garden
VC - Visitors Center
VG - Volunteer Garden
WCG - Water Celebration Garden
WDCG - Woodland Conservation Garden
WFG - Waterfall Garden
RR - Restrooms

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The North Main Street Well Field

- The North Main Street Well Field has supplied drinking water to the City of Elkhart since the late 1800s and continues to provide approximately 60% of the city's drinking water today.
- There are 13 active wells on site that draw water from an underground aquifer between 30–100 feet deep.
- The city pumps an average of 4.7 million gallons of water per day from this location.
- Site preparation included creating 4 large ponds from 6 smaller ones



The Creation of Wellfield

- The idea for Wellfield was proposed in 2002 by Rotarian Eric Amt to commemorate Rotary International's 100th anniversary.
- In 2005, Wellfield Botanic Gardens was incorporated as a private nonprofit and entered into a long-term lease with the City of Elkhart.
- The Gardens operate on 36 acres, 18 of which are water.
- Wellfield receives no government tax funding — it is 100% privately supported through donations, memberships, rentals, grants, and programming.
- A key lease requirement is that each garden must be fully funded before construction begins.
- Construction started in 2006, and the Gardens officially opened in 2007.
- Today, the Master Plan is approximately 80% complete.



What is a Botanic Garden?

- A botanic garden is a living museum of plants that are carefully collected, documented, labeled, and maintained for education and conservation.
- Botanic gardens help protect plant diversity, preserve rare species, and provide learning opportunities for visitors of all ages.

Wellfield by the Numbers

- **Volunteers:** Over 200 dedicated volunteers support the gardens
- **Recorded Plants:** 1,260+ plants documented in our collections
- **Accessions:** 1,900+ unique plant records (each representing a tracked plant or group)
- **Total Plant Material:** 3,122+ plants, seeds, tubers, corms, and cuttings in our care



Cottage

- Originally served as the main entrance to the Gardens from 2013-2024.
- During that time it welcomed nearly 1 million visitors.
- Now used as a space for educational programs, bridal suite, and backup admissions area.
- The sculpture “Freedom” by David R. Nelson symbolizes honoring commitments and the evolving nature of the Gardens.



Visitors Center

- The Visitors Center opened in 2024.
- The 12,000-square-foot building was designed to “bring the outside in,” using expansive windows and natural materials.
- The 30-foot diameter skylight in the Rotunda fills the interior with natural light throughout the day.
- The terrazzo floor radiates outward from the center, symbolizing ripples in water — reinforcing Wellfield’s core theme.
- The “**Botanica I**” by Peter Diepenbrock is a 22-foot long suspended sculpture that features over 150 colorful glass elements that shift with the light.
- “**Sunset on Wellfield**” by Greg Thompson and Kerry Causey is a large glass installation that depicts a vibrant sunset over water with lighting effects to create the illusion of shimmering, moving reflections.



Water Celebration Garden

- Dedicated in 2011 to celebrate water as the source of all life.
- Plantings are arranged in four vibrant seasonal color palettes: yellow, blue, orange, and purple.
- **“Thethys, Goddess of Sources of Fresh Water”**
 - 8-foot bronze sculpture of Tethys, Greek goddess of fresh water.
 - Symbolizes rivers, springs, and the life-giving power of water.
 - By sculptor Harold “Tuck” Langland.
- **“The Symphony of Love”**
 - Two lifesize great blue herons
 - By Ben Foster.



Bridge Garden

- Home to the 35,000-pound bridge used for municipal well maintenance access.
- Demonstrates how infrastructure and beauty coexist at Wellfield.
- Bridge color was intentionally chosen to enhance water reflections.



Volunteer Garden

- Built in 2014 to honor the volunteers who helped build and sustain Wellfield.
- Features 20 upright basalt standing stones representing service and dedication.
- Reinforces the idea that community support is the foundation of the Gardens.



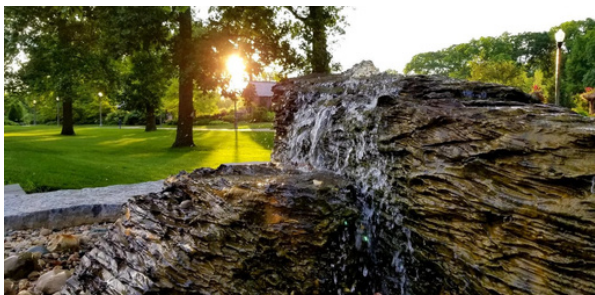
Annual Garden

- Changes twice each year for seasonal interest.
- Over 5,000 tulips are planted every fall.
- Showcases horticultural creativity.
- The “**Mother’s Day**” sculpture, made in Montana by Ken Bjorge, represents nurturing, protection, and new life.
- The bison on Swan Island, “**Indiana Buf falo**” and “**Mrs. Mike Bison**”, sourced from Montana by Ken Bjorge, honor the region’s natural heritage and symbolize strength and resilience, serving as a reminder of the native wildlife that once roamed this area.



Event Plaza

- Construction was completed in two phases: the west side in 2017 and the east side in 2018.
- The space spans over 7,000 square feet and is designed for events and gatherings.
- The rain garden helps naturally manage stormwater runoff.
- Dedicated in 2022, “**Dance of Life**” features three ascending figures representing a Myers Family story, created by Michelle Zorich and Katherine Martin from Kalamazoo, Michigan.



Event Garden

- Area designed for future development as a dedicated event space, currently awaiting funding from a donor.
- At the entrance is the 'Birch Grove,' designed to mirror the surrounding birch trees, with steel trunks color-matched to blend seamlessly into the landscape.
- The mesh panels overhead are purely decorative.



Children's Garden

- Completed in 2018, the Children's Garden was designed as an inquiry-based nature play space rather than a traditional playground.
- Features include a flowing stream with adjustable water valves, a floating lily pad bridge, a wetland boardwalk, a meadow crawl tunnel, and a treehouse with Crow's Nest swings.
- The Outdoor Amphitheater features step seating and shade sails, reinforces Wellfield's educational mission and serves as a hub for youth programming and school visits.
- The Tiki Hut has a thatched-roof that serves as a hands-on discovery space filled with games, books, and learning materials.
- Elevated walkways wind through a shaded canopy of towering sycamore trees offering peaceful views of Christiana Creek.
- The Tool Shed was built using eco-friendly "slip-straw" construction and repurposed materials like stone, brick, windows, and wine bottles for colorful accents.



Adventure Path

- Designed for exploration and discovery, especially for children.
- Includes embedded animal tracks representing native wildlife, an upper ‘mountain goat’ path, swamp boardwalk, and bird feeding garden.
- The “**Animal Suite**” bronze animal sculptures by Cara Lawson-Ball create surprise moments.
- The **Fish Arbor** welcomes guests with a whimsical fish-head beam designed and constructed by Eggink Construction Company and Gowdy Woodworks.



English Cottage Garden

- The English Cottage Garden was the first garden constructed at Wellfield and was dedicated in 2008.
- The Acorn Cottage was originally a functioning well house and was repurposed using salvaged materials, including architectural elements from a local Tudor-style home and studio. Acorns in cottage gardens symbolize good fortune, prosperity, strength, and new beginnings.
- The garden follows traditional English cottage design principles — informal planting, mixed materials, and layered color.
- Made with limestone, bluestone, brick, and grindstones—reflecting traditional English cottage gardens that reused leftover materials. Notice the creative mix of paving patterns.
- The dovecote on the west end of the garden was designed to resemble a traditional dovecote, a structure used to house pigeons or doves.
- The pergola at the west end of the Garden is made from a black oak cleared from the site.



Sensory Garden

- Designed to stimulate sight, smell, touch, and taste.
- Features herbs, vegetables, and textured plants.
- Accessible raised beds accommodate guests of all abilities.
- Produce supports the Seed to Feed program.
- Reinforces inclusivity and hands-on engagement.



Waterfall Garden

- Dedicated in 2014.
- Entry paths and floor of the pavilion are made of poured concrete embedded with various colors of glass aggregate.
- The glass pavilion overlooks several ponds including Christiana Creek, Old Beardsley Mill Pond, Bucklen Dam, and the South Pond.
- The laser-cut blue glass pavilion uses translucent and transparent glass.
- The Carpinus hedge frames the garden and provides privacy while adding texture and seasonal interest.
- “Wren” was created by Rick Stack and gifted in 2018



Pergola Garden

- Dedicated in 2013.
- Pergola structure provides shade and vertical interest.
- Swivel rocking chairs make this one of the most popular resting spots in the gardens.
- Visitors can enjoy a clear view of the nearby waterfall.



West Promenade

- This area highlights Indiana native plants, chosen for environmental conservation, habitat value, and lower maintenance.
- Frederick Law Olmsted's Principles guided the design of this garden.
- Runs along Christiana Creek and Lotus Pond.
- Stone pads along the path hold memorial benches, each with different planting colors.



Elk Garden

- Celebrates the city's name - Elkhart.
- Large bronze sculpture titled “The Roosevelt Elk.”
- The sculpture was created by artist Ken Bjorge of Montana, who also created the “Mothers Day” and Bison sculptures.
- The elk is 125% life-size.



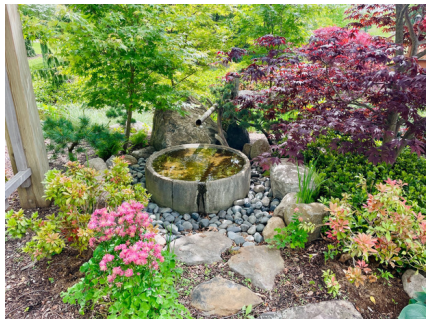
Island Garden

- The Island Garden is an authentic Japanese-inspired space, thoughtfully designed by renowned garden designer Sadafumi “Sada” Uchiyama, and officially opened in May of 2020.
- The garden is designed using the concept of hide and reveal, meaning the whole garden cannot be seen at once, and as a stroll-style garden, it’s meant to be experienced by walking through it rather than viewed from a single spot.
- Features over 100 tons of boulders and an 11-foot cascading stream.
- Includes five wooden bridges.
- Yu Sui Tei Pavilion translates to “Pavilion Befriended by Waters” and is the highest walkable point in Wellfield.
- The garden features four handcrafted Japanese Stone Lanterns, each with unique style and purpose from guiding visitors like lighthouses to marking important pathways.
- Emphasizes harmony, texture, asymmetry, and quiet reflection.



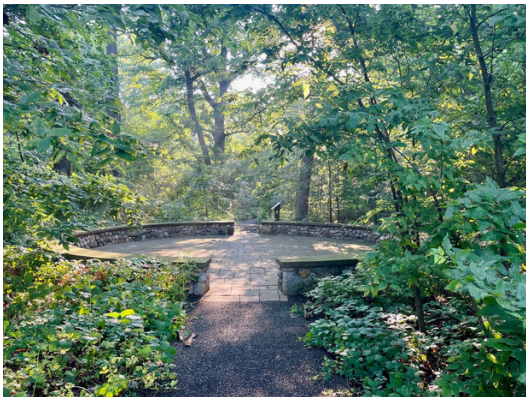
Peace Garden

- The Peace Garden was inspired by traditional Japanese stroll gardens and is designed as a space for quiet reflection and remembrance.
- At its center is a tsukubai-style stone arrangement and features a 600-pound historic millstone at the entrance used as a ceremonial water basin.
- The word “tsukubai” means “to bow,” symbolizing humility and mindfulness.
- “Emerging Peace” by Kevin Box is a stainless steel sculpture inspired by origami and was featured in Wellfield’s 2021 ‘Origami in the Garden’ exhibit.
- The garden includes carefully placed stones, subtle plantings, and quiet seating areas intended to slow visitors down.



Woodland Conservation Garden

- Dedicated in 2013 as an example of ecological restoration.
- Over 60 dump truck loads of debris removed during remediation.
- Features native woodland species.
- Pathways made from recycled rubber saved hundreds of tires from landfills.
- Highlights sustainability and habitat restoration.
- Located at the western edge of the Woodland Conservation Garden, the Council Ring is built from local glacial fieldstone and designed as a circular gathering space inspired by Native American traditions.



Spring Garden

- Dedicated in 2012.
- Contains over 40 varieties of flowering trees and shrubs plus over 30,000 bulbs.
- Memorial Tree: Star Magnolia gifted in 2020.



Conversation Garden

- This garden serves as a peaceful stop along the trail where guests can pause and reflect on the surrounding landscape.
- Sculptures and seating areas reinforce Wellfield's focus on art, nature, and community coming together.



Woodland Pavilion

- Nestled within the woodland setting, this open-air pavilion is crafted from Douglas Fir, blending natural materials with its serene surrounding.
- Used for gatherings, events, and educational programs.
- Demonstrates how event spaces can integrate seamlessly into natural environments.
- At the head of the Rill Garden, the 9-foot tall “Sunflower” sculpture by Fritz Olsen, carved from Vermont marble and weighing over 2,150 pounds, was installed in 2025.



Wellfield Website



Garden Map

