

National Capital Area Garden Clubs



Fern Valley - 2011

Fern Valley – A Native Plant Garden

At the U.S. National Arboretum . . .

A tranquil gateway to a place of absolute peace!

Fern Valley is a 'Cinderella' Story. Up until the late 1950's the area had been a refuse heap in the Arboretum. It was untended and covered with honeysuckle vines, poison ivy and other invasive plants. This small site was to become recycled land when the garden clubs agreed to restore this area with ferns at first, then trees and other native plants.



Fern Valley - 1950's



Edith Bittinger and Margaret Donnel

The National Capital Garden Club League, Inc. begun in 1951, now named National Capital Area Garden Clubs Inc., created Fern Valley as a joint project with the Arboretum in 1959. The transformation began with the vision of two garden club members. They were Edith Bittinger and Margaret Donnell. The first plantings in the garden were ferns donated by Edith Bittinger, the Fern society and others, thus the name 'Fern Valley' began.

During those early years garden club members raised funds to ensure the success of this native plant garden. They worked tirelessly planting, digging, watering and weeding.

In 1968 a committee was organized to acquire about 3,000 plants from garden club members to add color to the garden during the summer months. Fern Valley was opened to the public in 1969



Dedication of Fern Valley - 1960

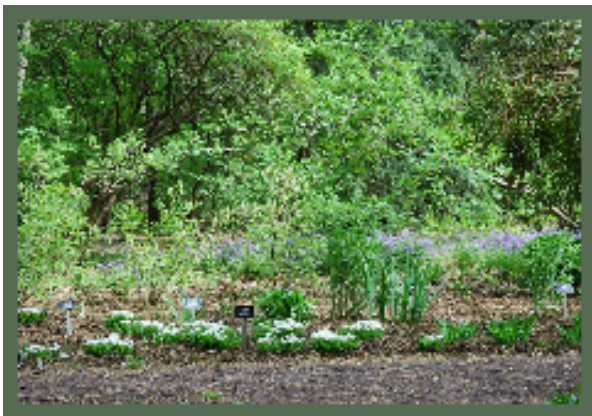
with members stationed along the trails to welcome guests and provide information about the garden and its plants. In those first 10 years, 52,000 plants were collected, salvaged, or donated to Fern Valley.



Left to Right - Ann Bucher, Ellen Spencer, Shirley Nicolai, Mary Ellen Alden, Helen Reed, Rilla Crane, Carol Carter, Marion Caldwell

Fern Valley has been supported by National Garden Clubs in every President's term since its beginning with volunteers and contributions. The garden carries so much history with it of the National Capital Area Garden Clubs. A 50th Anniversary Celebration of Fern Valley was held in May 2010.

This is a Garden for the Senses. The visitor will see and hear nature at its finest while feathery ferns and native plants touch legs while walking along the paths. Breathe in the woody smells. Stop and taste the pleasure of this small native plant garden that refreshes the mind and restores the spirit in this quiet oasis near the Nation's Capitol.



Fern Valley is also a Garden for All Seasons. Spring brings an awakening of the dormant plants and small wildlife activity here. A freshness permeates the air and invigorates new growth. Life begins anew.

Summer brings blooms to the wildflowers as the sun grows warmer. Bees are bussing and the garden is alive with activity. Take a quiet walk along the paths to the pond and stream. Listen to the frogs in the pond and sit awhile on the benches to contemplate this natural work of art.





Fall is a special treat for the visitor with a final burst of wildflower color and a profusion of butterflies gathering the last nectar. It is picture taking time.

Winter brings the senses to full attention with the sound of dry leaves underfoot and chattering birds overhead in the trees. Every sound seems so clear, almost amplified. It is a joy to listen and feel a small part of it.



This is a Native Plant Garden with plants from the eastern United States. They are planted for their educational benefits and enjoyment. There is no glitz here, no frills, no manicured meadows nor trails ; just pure natural beauty.

Plants have identification markers with their botanical name and there is a map at the entrance to Fern Valley for a walking tour. Cell phones may now be used for a self guided tour with more information. The number to use is posted in the garden.

(Article Written By & Great Supporter of Fern Valley, Rilla Crane, National Capital Area's President - 2007 through 2009)