

Castle Farms

Gardens Guide



The contents of this guide are primarily excerpts from the book 'For the Love of a Castle II, The Romance Continues, The Biography of Castle Farms Charlevoix, Michigan' written by Linda Mueller and Kathleen Irene Paterka. To explore the Castle's history, and learn more, purchase your copy in the Castle Farms gift shop today!



Linda Mueller's passion for castles is rivaled only by her love of gardens. The gardens at Castle Farms – formal and informal- match any of their counterparts found throughout Europe. Drawing on instinct rather than a master plan, Linda's "little sketches" have evolved into stunning works of natural beauty. Through her study of the French gardens of Louis XIV and his landscaper, André Le Nôtre, she discovered the thrill of experimenting with different designs. Blending old-world models with a 21st Century approach of sustainable gardening, Linda uses native plants whenever possible, as they are less labor intensive and more suited to the environment. She considers the Castle Farms gardens to be a particular blessing from God, who loves gardens, just as He does weddings, families, and people having peaceful days. Explore this Garden Guide to learn about what makes the gardens of Castle Farms so special!

Formal Gardens

Formal gardens are laid out in geometric and symmetric patterns, lending themselves to peaceful and orderly design. Because the buildings of Castle Farms were built as barns, most sides of the buildings are not symmetrical. Consequently, only a few of the Castle gardens are symmetrical and formal.

The King's Grand Court Garden

The King's Court and Grand Court are the Castle's most formal gardens, with a number of elements found in Renaissance gardens incorporated within their designs. The King's Court is divided by the main axis sidewalk, with the Castle's front door as the focal point, a perpendicular cross-axis sidewalk dividing the lawn (grass parterre) into quarters, and the cross-axis road serving as the fourth side of the rectangle. Decorative urns stand along the Castle wall. The King's Grand Court has more extravagant design features: four classical statues depicting the Four Seasons, and ornate stone lions; an ornamental water fountain with a thirty-foot diameter pool and a twenty-foot high column of water featured in its center; an allee of trees planted on each side of the walkway; flowers beds surrounded by boxwood in geometric shapes; garden rooms outlined by formal hedges; an elaborate structure in the form of a circular metal gazebo set outside the main garden area serving as a focal point for the cross-axis; potted plants in Proven Winners aqua pots to provide flourishes of color; and a raised terrace from which to view the parterre below.

The King's Court Garden

The King's Court Garden, between the East and West wings, was the first of two formal gardens built in this area. The four grass lawns are divided by intersecting sidewalks which form a cross and feature a giant chess board set within its center. Formal garden designs feature defined flowerbeds, sidewalks, and tend to have parameters close to buildings.

The Butterfly Garden

Created in 2006, the Butterfly Garden is a secluded sanctuary, with an axis and cross axis walkway which make it a perfect example of a formal garden. The boxwood hedges and beds afford complete privacy, and the distinctive butterfly chairs offer a fanciful touch. Colorful maintenance free Proven Winner flowers and butterfly bushes assure this garden abounds with butterflies. Additionally, the Butterfly Garden features arches designed within its hedges which visitors can walk through. Focal points can also be seen directly through the arches. Straight through, Norm the Dragon beckons visitors to follow that path. To the right, a rustic gazebo by the Reflection Pond invites visitors to sit awhile. Look closely to the left, and you may catch a glimpse of a mysterious covered passageway leading to a secret courtyard. Care to guess what lurks inside the tower with the locked door?



Enclosed Gardens

The East Garden

The East Garden holds the distinction of being the second oldest garden at Castle Farms. Tucked between the East Garden Room and the parking area, the East Garden is long and thin, and features a rock retaining wall and tall hedges closing in the side away from the building. The East Garden Room opens out through French doors to sidewalks around two symmetrically shaped lawns. These separate private courtyard areas of the East Garden are graced with morning sunshine, garden chairs, and a small formal fountain. Inspired by a French castle garden, the East Garden is a quiet spot where visitors may enjoy a moment's respite from the hectic pace of modern-day life. Plants are annually updated, blending old world models with a 21st century approach to sustainable gardening.

The King's West Garden & Trellis Walkway

The West Garden has three other traditional Renaissance Garden elements. To the south, a covered gazebo surrounded by boxwood hedges and planters blooming with flowers serves as the focal point. Occasionally this garden is used for weddings, with the bridal couple standing in the gazebo as the ceremony takes place. Directly across to the north, a decorative fountain with tiered bowls stands surrounded by flowery shrubs. Perhaps the most interesting formal element of the West Garden is the vine-covered trellis above the sidewalk leading guests to the garden's entrance. Designed after the covered walkway found at Anne Boleyn's childhood home of Hever Castle near Kent, England, this shady walkway is a cool sanctuary on summer afternoons. The lavender flowers which abound add to the illusion of peacefulness and serenity.

The Knight's Courtyard Garden, Dedicated to John Van Haver

Part of the original stable grounds of Loeb Farms, this beautiful, secluded garden bordered by hedges, was the first Castle garden to be completed by Linda Mueller. Colorful daffodils, tulips, holly hocks, lavender, bleeding hearts, begonias, coreopsis and iris abound, but the Knight's Courtyard Garden is most renowned for its thornless roses: Zephrine Drouin, with its sweet, sensual fragrance; and Kathleen Harrop, developed in 1919 (the era that Castle Farms was built). Kiss a frog and he'll turn into a prince? This garden also features a Prince Charming frog fountain (originally a horse trough) which flows continuously. The Knight's Courtyard Garden was dedicated to John Van Haver in 2006, in recognition of his foresight for preserving the property as a castle, as well as a historic landmark.

"There are so many times during a person's day when they're hassled or when they're rushed and things aren't going well. It's nice just to get a breather, to get a little beauty and peace in your soul. A lot of people say it's very peaceful here, and formal gardens typically are very peaceful, very stable, very orderly. A lot of people don't have that in their lives - stability, peace, and order. So, even though it's not currently in fashion, people need tranquility and order."

Test Gardens

The Queen's Rose Garden

When Linda began planning the Queen's Rose Garden, she spent an entire winter researching roses. Her criteria were very specific: she wanted only roses that were hardy, disease resistant, fragrant, pretty, and not prickly. Linda's search for nearly thornless roses could be traced back to her childhood as she experienced an unfortunate run-in with some prickly types in a game of blind man's bluff! The Mr. Lincoln and Miss All-American Beauty varieties she stumbled into were covered with blossoms, but unfortunately, also covered with thorns.

Surprisingly enough, the incident did not end Linda's love affair with roses. After pouring through rose books, websites, magazines, and catalogs, she eventually had a list of fifty potential candidates, which were further narrowed down to the ten roses most likely to fit the qualifications. For the Queen's Garden and the Knight's Garden: deep pink Basye's Blueberry, yellow Golden Celebration, light pink Heritage, white Iceberg, pink James Galway, bright pink John Clare, light pink Kathleen Harrop, bright pink Thomas Affleck, mauve Reine de Violette, and pink Zephirine Drouhin were chosen. Others were added over the years.

Since Linda began testing in 2007, she has discovered only four truly thornless roses that will grow and thrive in Northern Michigan. Two climbers: Zephirine Drouhin, and its sport Kathleen Harrop; plus Basye's Blueberry (named as its foliage resembles blueberry leaves) and Swamp Rose (the ever-blooming variety, which is Linda's preference). Several other roses are very nearly thornless; the yellow miniature Baby Love, the pink miniature Oso Happy Smoothie, and the pale pink Marie Pavie. As for the most fragrant nearly thornless roses in the Queen's Garden (and also promising relatively few prickles), Heritage and James Galway claim the Castle prize.

When ordering from a catalog, Linda advises trying one first, as it's difficult to see how the stems look. She suspects most people only care about the flowers. She tries to keep the roses labeled so guests visiting the Castle can see and compare the different varieties and decide for themselves whether they would like to try them. She also prefers not to use chemical sprays on the Castle's roses, as she deems the lives of bees more important than developing the perfect plant. Spraying soapy water on flowers and new growth will spot aphids and beetles, at least long enough for the pesky bugs to be removed before they can fly to another bloom. Plants prone to disease are banished forever, leaving space for new varieties to join the family of Castle gardens. As always, testing goes on.

The Black Flower Bed

Linda Mueller's unique visualization in garden design was once again on display in 2020 with her creation of The Black Flower Bed. Since her purchase of the Castle in 2001, Linda's desire to enhance the beauty and variety of specific flowers, colors, and new flower bed designs grew, rather than diminished. She found the idea of black flowers intriguing, and so she quickly got to work. A raised flower bed was created in honor the Black Queen from the game of chess. Black Mamba petunias flourished in the spot, doing well enough to take pride of place in the Children's Alphabet Garden, sponsored by the Letter P! Other flowers such as black lilies, Blackberry Ice Coral Bells, and black iris lend satirical shades with their deep purples and blacks to the Black Flower Bed.

Children's Gardens

The Alphabet Garden

Children love reciting their ABC's in the Alphabet Garden. Designed in 2007, this pretty little garden runs along the north side of the Hedge Maze. With whimsical painted figures and colorful signs, the Alphabet Garden features flowers ranging throughout the entire alphabet from Astilbe through Zinnia.

The Hedge Maze

Schedule a stop at The Castle Hedge Maze, part of The Castle Train Garden(s). Train tracks swoop overhead as guests enter or leave the maze through one of the three entrances or exits. Inside the maze, small stone statues such as a swift sure-footed hare and slow-moving tortoise race through twists and turns.

The Castle Garden Railroad

Model trains have always played a special role in the Castle's history. Ernest Loeb and his older brother, Allen, were train aficionados. Even as adults, the two brothers spent considerable time working on train layouts. At Christmas time, Ernest splurged on elaborate Lionel train sets for his three daughters, adding more track each year. During the holidays, Ernest and Allen would host a "train party" for their friends and children. But since the tracks had to be manually moved with "Y" switches, Ernest and Allen were always involved, with them eventually taking over. Each year, the children ended up as spectators rather than being able to enjoy playing with their new train cars. Just like the Loeb brothers, Richard Mueller Jr., and his brother Glenn share a love for trains. Richard liked designing and building complicated train layouts, while Glenn was happiest working with scenery. When the two brothers became grandfathers, they decided to get back into model train building, and to concentrate their efforts on outdoor designs. Richard and Glenn's creativity in track layouts and scenery eventually culminated in the Castle Model Garden Railroad. Opened in 2008, it immediately proved a favorite spot for children of all ages. Part of the Garden Railway celebrates Charlevoix's rich railroad history by depicting scenes from the 1860's through the 1960's. A replica of the Pere Marquette passenger train steams into Charlevoix via the historical railroad swing bridge, past the Charlevoix lighthouse, and arrives at the Charlevoix train depot. Trains steam across bridges, through tunnels and past a waterfall. A Victorian tower bridge with two separate towers offers visitors a bird's eye view of the train and tracks. The 2010 Fantasy Railroad expansion nearly doubled the Castle's Garden Railroad size. Today, with more than forty-five G-scale trains operating on seven separate levels and zipping across more than two thousand feet of track, the Castle's Model Garden Railroad is one of the largest working modern garden railroads in Michigan.

The Enchanted Forest

A whimsical wooden sign points the way to The Enchanted Forest, one of the most magical spots at the Castle. At the entrance to the Forest, take a moment to linger long enough to savor the delights wafting from the Herb Garden, the air redolent with the sweet scent of French tarragon, summer savory, germander, tansy, calendula, oregano, borage, and basil. Inside the Enchanted Forest, children of all ages delight in playing hide-and-seek with the fairies, gnomes, and dragons dwelling beneath the bushes and trees, visiting the North/South Poles, plus crisscrossing bridges and strolling the twisting paths. Quail, rabbits, birds, wolves, and porcupine have also been spotted.

Sculptures

It took three years of non-stop work to develop the garden area of Birch Lake. Once the heavy lifting was done and perennials were put in place, it was finally time to add the fun stuff. Linda's husband Richard discovered and purchased the fanciful spinning kinetic art sculptures that are easily seen from across the grounds. These sculptures are almost always moving, even in the slightest breeze. There is also a "dry sculpture pond" beneath the young birch trees. Once of Richard's friends designs and fashions sculptures out of discarded metal objects, and the "pond" is now home to numerous turtles with hub cap shells and golf club heads, as well as an Electrolux heron and a huge orange motorcycle gas tank frog. Definitely fun stuff! Feeding the trout and ducks also qualifies as an entertaining way to pass the time.

The Dragon's Lair

"We need a dragon!" Linda Mueller was fond of telling visitors to the Castle. Such was life before renowned horticulturist Rob McCartney contacted Linda with exciting news: her dream of a Castle dragon was finally coming true. In 2013, the Castle welcomed its most spine-tingling visitor yet. One of 25 semi-finalists in Grand Rapids' 2012 International ArtPrize competition, "Norm the Dragon" stands his ground as a fiery sentinel from within the Dragon's Lair. Crafted entirely from recycled metal materials by artist John Andrews of Florida, Norm boasts over 6,900 scales, clawed feet, humongous wings, and razor-sharp teeth. Surrounded by sinister plants and flowers such as Smoke Bushes, Prickly Pear Cactus, Scarlet Flame Carpet Phlox, Crocosmia Lucifer Flowers, and Dragon's Blood Sedum, Norm stands guard over the Castle, assuring visitors that all are welcome, and all is well.

Two Brass Beauties

Horses played a vital role during the days of Loeb Farms. Used for transporting equipment and cultivating large plots of land, Loeb's thirteen pair of prize-winning Belgian horses were housed in the horse barn. Nearly one hundred years later, two more horses have found a permanent home at the Castle. But unlike their predecessors, these two horses are not housed in the horse barn, but rather, directly outside it. Standing tall at a height of nine feet and each weighing in at a hefty six hundred pounds, the two brass horses were gifted by Glenn and Val Mueller to Linda and Richard on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary. After much discussion as to where the horses should be placed, they eventually settled in on the turf directly in front of the Blacksmith Shop (much to Linda's amusement). Whether they'll remain is anyone's guess, especially since these two brass beauties appear ready to bolt before they can be captured and shod. "Apparently", Linda jokes, "they don't want new shoes on their feet!"

St. George the Dragon Slayer

St. George the Dragon Slayer casts an imposing figure as he stands guard at the Castle entrance, greeting visitors, and watching out for those with nefarious intent. Crafted entirely of metal, this sixteen-foot-tall medieval knight statue was originally imported from Mexico, and spent time in Laredo, Texas, and Florence, Mississippi. Since 2016, St. George has spent his years in the northern clime. A 2016 Christmas gift from Linda's brother-in-law, Glenn Mueller, Linda immediately named the imposing knight "St. George the Dragon Slayer". She placed him at the entrance to Castle Farms, where he is now one of the first things visitors will see. "St. George the Dragon Slayer heralds from Mississippi. He has a few dents from Hurricane Katrin, but he survived," says Linda. In the spirit of COVID, proper social distancing is maintained between Norm the Dragon and St. George the Dragon Slayer.

Landscaping Team

Kevin Pearsall

Kevin Pearsall, or “KP”, of Charlevoix has played an integral role in helping design, manage, and maintain the Castle gardens since 2002. His business, KP Landscaping, now serves as the Castle’s official certified landscaping professional, with the responsibility of caring for and maintaining all the Castle gardens. It was through KP’s encouragement and efforts several years ago that Proven Winners flowers were incorporated within the Castle grounds. New plants are continually introduced, with pots of annuals providing vivid pops of color. Beauty and environmental concerns achieve a harmonious blending within the Castle’s landscape design, bringing a 21st century approach to sustainable gardening. In 2021, Castle Farms received the distinction of being designated an official “Proven Winner Signature Garden” site.

Rob McCartney

Rob McCartney, a nationally renowned horticulturist, has extensive experience with the design and maintenance of formal gardens, as well as ponds and streams. His role as a professional design consultant to Linda Mueller throughout the years has seen fruition in the beauty of the Castle gardens, including the recent addition of Birch Lake.

Jack Barnwell

Jack Barnwell is an award-winning garden designer and landscape architect. His expertise and efforts with Proven Winners are on display throughout the Castle gardens. His collaboration with the Castle landscaping team has resulted in stunning arrays of various plants and designs requiring minimal upkeep and nearly zero maintenance.

“You’re closer to God’s heart in a garden than anyplace else on Earth.”

Gallery



Birch Lake



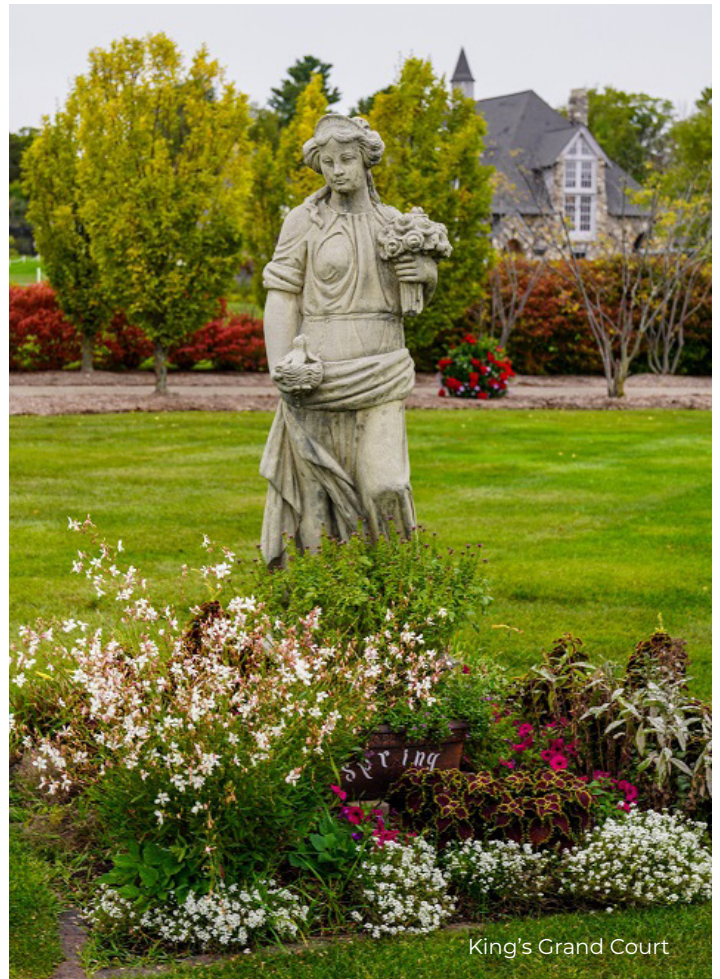
St. George the Dragon Slayer



Butterfly Garden



Knight's Courtyard



King's Grand Court

"Most of my fun stories are on me. I like to talk to visitors, answer questions and make them feel welcome at the Castle. I don't always introduce who I am. One of our visitors stopped in the gift shop on the way out and remarked that we have the friendliest gardener. Peggy, a longtime member of the Castle staff, laughed and said, 'You must have met the owner!'"



Knight's Courtyard

"I went to Atlanta, Georgia in the winter of 2012-2013 with our Tour and Gift Shop Director, Peggy, to visit Merchant Mart, where we do much of our buying for the Castle. While I was there, I spotted four big stone statues, four season statues, like the French gardens have. Spring has a bird's nest in hand, while Summer holds a cluster of grapes. Fall's arms contain a sheath of wheat, and Winter warms her hands over a flame.

I made sure they were fully clothed. They're a little revealing, but definitely clothed. I thought to myself, 'Perfect!' They'd look great in the King's Grand Court Garden. The concrete statues were made in Texas and came with pedestals. Each of the statues, including pedestals, weighed over eight hundred pounds. I also bought lots of ornamental garden decor, plus eight garden benches, and four cement lions. Finally, I was ready to place my sales order. The gentleman running the sales booth had a roulette wheel, which you could give a spin and win money off your total purchase: \$100 off, 10% off, etc. I thought to myself, 'This will be fun!' Well! I took hold of the wheel and gave it a spin. The salesman nearly fainted when it came up 'FREE SHIPPING'. My one lucky spin amounted to nearly 5,000 pounds of free shipping. While I did feel bad, I took it! Lucky for me, the salesman honored his offer; although, when the next year came around, I noticed that his Spin the Wheel game no longer included free shipping."



Reflection Pond viewed from Serenity Garden



The Black Flower Bed



West Courtyard



Queen's Rose Garden



Queen's Drive Garden



Reflection Pond

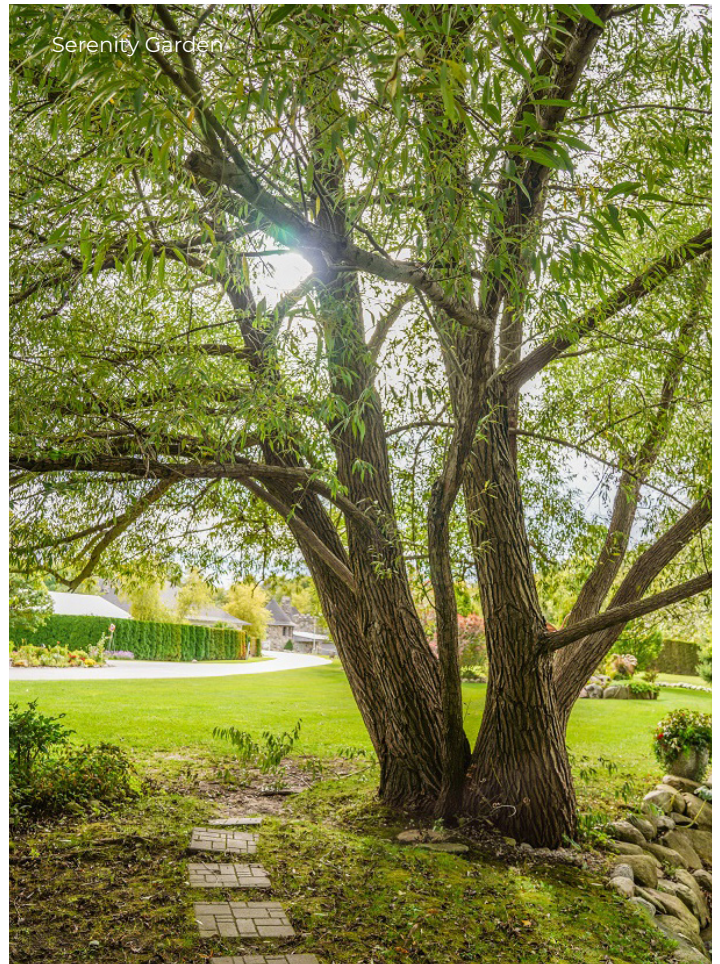
"The gardens I designed were mostly drawn by hand on graph paper. I feel so bad for my poor landscaper, Kevin Pearsall ("KP"), and his team at KP Landscaping. All they had to work with were my simply graph paper drawings. No elevations, no plant lists, no dimensions. But KP seemed to know what I wanted and somehow managed to do it perfectly! Our minds were in sync, and the gardens turned out to be exactly what I had envisions."



Aqua Pot Annual Variety



West Courtyard



Serenity Garden

"I love castles and gardens, castle and garden books, and castle and garden magazines. When we travel, I scout out any public gardens along the way. Richard is so supportive, and he takes me to as many gardens as I can find. Then we take lots of pictures and buy books and postcards. I have quite a library. I may be the only person who still looks at guide books 20 years after I bought them. When I am not traveling, I pour over books, magazines and photos, and keep folders of ideas. Every so often, a garden feature will jump out at me and I will have just the right spot to incorporate it into the Castle property."



Butterfly Garden

