

[Photos, graphics and other information can be found at:

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/dakota-gardener/dakota-gardener-munsinger-and-clemens-gardens-a-love-story>]

Dakota Gardener: Munsinger and Clemens Gardens a Love Story

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Many husbands express their love by giving their wives a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

Bill Clemens of St. Cloud, Minn., was no ordinary husband. His lovely wife, Virginia, suffered from multiple sclerosis and could no longer travel to visit the formal gardens that she loved.

To brighten her view from their family home, Bill purchased property across the street and built the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden. With more than 1,000 hybrid tea and shrub roses, Bill began a project that would become a regional treasure that we can all enjoy on the way to the Twin Cities.

Clemens Gardens, now managed by the St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department, encompasses six different gardens spanning seven acres. Each garden is designed to have a formal European aesthetic and each garden feels like a separate room. Formal arborvitae hedges separate the gardens and provide a neutral backdrop for the colorful flowers and brick-lined pathways.

The Treillage Garden is dominated by a domed iron trellis that splits the garden into four separate quadrants with monochromatic themed gardens. Each color evokes different emotions.

The yellow quadrant embodies cheerfulness and the red quadrant, with its saturated color, feels extraordinarily rich and warm. In contrast, the purple quadrant plays with silver foliage to create an atmosphere of cool refinement.

The Perennial Garden is a riot of colorful plants but it is also educational. It showcases hardy plants that will endure year after year in northern climates.

Of all the gardens, the White Garden is my favorite. Every flower in the garden is white. Inspired by the White Garden at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, England, the garden is far from boring. The garden uses contrasts of form, height and texture to recreate the elegance of a formal European garden.

The Formal Garden and the Rest Area Garden complete the collection of six gardens and feature extravagant fountains and statues of Bill and Virginia Clemens, to whom we give thanks for this labor of love.

If this wasn't enough, Munsinger Gardens lies immediately across the street to the west along the banks of the Mississippi River. Formerly the site of a sawmill, this 13-acre area was transformed into a shady cottage garden during the 1930s.

The Works Progress Administration planted white pines and other trees to provide dappled shade for the meandering paths and informal gardens. Hostas, coleus and other shade-tolerant flowers line the paths. Munsinger Gardens is perfect for a family picnic and contains picnic tables, swinging benches that face the Mississippi River, a fairy garden and even peacocks.

With Covid-19, many people are looking for safe, regional trips that do not require flying. Munsinger and Clemens Gardens in St. Cloud fit the bill. They are an easy 2 1/2-hour drive from Fargo.

The gardens are open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and admission is free. Take your sweetheart here to experience the great love that built these gardens.

For more information about gardening, contact your local NDSU Extension agent. Find the Extension office for your county at <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory/counties>.

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