

Retirees' passion for flowers thrives

The Chelsea Retirement Community (CRC) welcomed Stephen Rogers in March 2000 and just over a year later, to Rogers' passion, the rhododendron.

Today, Rogers' contribution to his neighbors is now in full bloom on the CRC campus. The garden he planted represents his dedication and also his expertise on one of the most challenging projects for any gardener. Rogers has been a member of the Ann Arbor chapter of the American Rhododendron Society since 1975, and upon his arrival at CRC, wanted to bring his love for the flower with him. He spotted a shaded garden nook between two buildings, an ideal place for the light-sensitive flower, and proceeded to bring all the elements together for the current garden. "With its high protective walls, I knew it would be an ideal location for rhododendrons, offering a shield against winter winds," explained Rogers. "I asked CRC Administrator Connie Amick if I could put in a rhododendron garden, and she said yes."



Encouraged by CRC staff, Rogers called on his longstanding relationship with the Rhododendron Society for help in putting his flora collection together, and knowledge of the flower to have the soil tested to ensure they would grow properly. He was also aided by several CRC residents and maintenance crews, who added sprinklers, helped prep the soil and donated funds and trees to complete the garden and complement the rhododendrons.

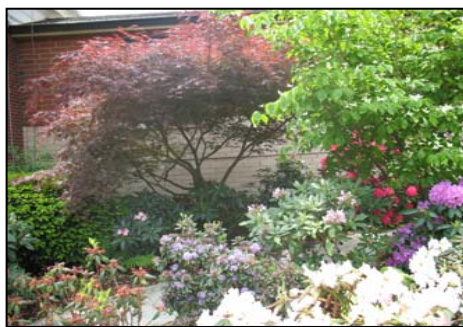
Rogers' love of flowers comes from watching his mother's passion while he was a young boy. His interest grew from there, and intensified when he had a home of his own.

"When my wife and I purchased our last home in Ann Arbor in 1972, we wanted to develop the backyard into a nice garden. We joined the Rhododendron Society to help us learn more about these plants, which we had seen at shows," Rogers said.

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When it came time to plant the CRC garden, Rogers knew his first obligation toward the plants was to have the soil tested. He sent in soil samples to the Michigan State University Extension Service, which tested the soil and provided a report, including recommendations for changing soil conditions. "Rhododendrons like an acidic soil," Rogers said. "Our soil at CRC was largely clay. We had to change it for better drainage and acidic conditions. It is very important to take the right steps needed by the plants for health and growth – and maintain that condition," he explained, as he held a copy of the report for CRC's garden.



Stephen Rogers brought his love of flowers to CRC

Rogers recommends having the soil tested before planting any garden, and telling the MSU Extension Service what you wish to plant. The service offers advice on what will make the best planting ground for specific plant life. Every winter, a landscaping service wraps the flowers in burlap, to protect from the cold and whipping winter winds. When the flowers are unwrapped, the Rhododendron Society replaces any dead plants, to keep the garden healthy and thriving.

Rogers tends the garden during the year, keeping meticulous care of the plants and occasionally adding complementary plants, such as a Kousa Chinese white dogwood, donated by another CRC resident, and Clematis vines to provide color in the fall when the flowers are not in bloom.