



Program Bulletin- Garden Tour

Program Overview

This program serves as a guided tour of Colonial Michilimackinac's many gardens, with an emphasis on the documentary and archaeological evidence used to inform modern plantings. The tour is broken down thematically by the three types of gardens currently maintained at the fort. This program explains the ways in which gardens supplemented the foods and household supplies that were being used during the 1770s at Michilimackinac.

Background

Gardening at Michilimackinac was never a matter of self-sufficiency. Throughout the site's history, the region's sandy soil and climate conditions, as well as the occupations of the inhabitants, prevented agricultural operations large enough to supply even the smallest household. Most staple crops like wheat, peas and corn were produced further east, in Europe, or further inland in Indigenous-owned fields. Anything that could be shipped in was generally not produced locally in large quantities. Archaeological and documentary evidence, such as the merchant John Askin's journals, indicates the presence of small backyard gardens inside the fort and in a few areas outside the palisade. Those gardens were only large enough to supply individual homes with some fresh greens and other small crops. These items added variety and nutrition to a diet that was largely reliant on fish, bread, preserved meats, and other shelf stable goods.

Commanding Officer's Garden

By 1774 the garden behind the Commanding Officer's House was quite large. It was a place for the Capt. Arent DePeyster, the commanding officer, and his wife Rebecca to grow greens and vegetables, as well as flowers for enjoyment both outside and inside the home. The garden is laid out symmetrically, which is consistent with the general design trends popular during the mid- to late 18th century. Raised beds allowed the gardener to control the soil quality and helped to keep the paths neat. Large gardens required a great deal of manual labor to maintain, and the DePeysters probably did not perform heavy work themselves. Arent DePeyster's writings mention a servant woman named Susan who potentially helped tend the gardens, along with doing other household work. Hired and enslaved servants, as well as soldiers, may also have worked in the garden to water, weed and do other chores.

Some of the plants that you will see growing in this garden today include lovage, irises, chives, rue, and catmint.

Kitchen Garden

Most of the home for year-round residents of Michilimackinac had fenced-off backyard gardens. These permanent residents likely used their yards to cultivate a variety of useful plants that fit into the relatively small growing spaces. Some gardeners used trellises to save space, or employed succession planting to get the most use out of their growing season. Some plants were used for food, medicines, or other household purposes such as pest control.

In this garden you will see plants like lavender, lettuce, roses, onions, and grapes.

Military Garden

Some of Michilimackinac's most recognizable residents were the soldiers. Initially French, after 1761 the garrison was British. To provide a source of fresh food for these soldiers, in 1765 the easternmost unit of the Southwest Rowhouse was demolished and the ground turned into a garden tended by the enlisted men. Most food that comprised a soldier's daily ration was shipped in, requiring items to be dried, salted, or otherwise preserved to withstand a journey that could last several months. However, officials also recognized that access to fresh produce was critical to maintain the soldiers' health and morale. In places like Michilimackinac where there was no markets to purchase these locally-grown fresh foods, the army encouraged soldiers to tend their own gardens and harvest the resulting fruits and vegetables, which were then added to the official ration.

Some of the most common plants grown in the soldiers' gardens were mustard, cabbage, onions, and carrots.

