

# Center for Medieval Studies

## The Medieval Garden

### Status of the Medieval Garden

The original medieval garden, located at the corner of Park and Shortledge is no more, as the land became part of the new Law School building in 2006. The Medieval Garden has, however, been allotted new space in the developing Penn State Arboretum (see proposed site plan - originally the garden was to be integral to the formal beds [#6], but it is now envisioned to be on the northwest border, near #19), and will rise again.

## History of the Original PSU Medieval Garden



The location of Penn State's medieval garden almost within the shadow of Beaver Stadium- is almost as unlikely



as the way the garden came into being in the first place. Campus visitors, drawn by both the color of the Trial Gardens in the summer and the odd looking series of wattle fencing, raised beds, wellheads, stone walls, and rose arbors come in a steady flow. High school students from the Governor's School in Agriculture make their own herbals, while a local herbal study group harvests some of the more rampant medicinals and runs educational programs in exchange. At a university that is deservedly well known for its strengths in agriculture and the applied sciences, the garden makes a permanent statement about the study of the Middle Ages, to faculty and students as well as to the general public. When the Center for Medieval Studies mounted its conference and fair on the medieval landscape in 1999, our third involving Agriculture, we approached colleagues in horticulture about the possibility of having a medieval garden at the fair. Horticulture had just appointed a restoration landscape architect, Martin McGann, to teach its landscaping contracting program. Prof. McGann, who had previously worked in historic properties in New York's lower Hudson valley and at the New York Botanical Garden, recreated a medieval garden for the fair and suggested afterwards that we try to find funding for it to remain permanently. He offered to contribute his own time to the design and planting, and the labor of his landscaping contracting classes, who would use this as a learning and service project. AT&T, which has a contract for phone service with Penn State, had been funding Center projects for five years; the Center approached our AT&T liaison, Lynne Scheden, with the idea. Ms. Scheden was able to convince AT&T that this project was worth the \$15,000 needed for supplies and plants. Another key donation was the location of the garden. Thanks to the generosity of the director of the PSU Horticulture Trial Gardens, Prof. Robert Berghage, we were given a wonderful piece of real estate for the project, which has been crucial to its success. The garden consists of



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three major plots. The first is the kitchen garden, which groups by usage, plants needed by medieval households. The medicinal section includes everything from poisonous plants to rose bushes (such as the *Rosa canina* and the *Rosa mundi*), a dyeing section, and a fragrance bed. The vegetables are those commonly used in the Middle Ages, such as leeks, onions, cabbage, and many pottage plants. A stone well in the middle of the raised beds and wattle fencing recognizes AT&T's support. The second part, the pleasure ground, consists of a combination of flowering plants as well as some small fruits. The meadow, in the middle of which is a bench, is full of hollyhocks, wild strawberries, English daisies, Sweet William, and other flowers. A more decorative type of wattle fencing, appropriate to the more elegant nature of this section, combines with hawthorn trees to form an enclosure on three sides. The fourth side is bounded by beds containing medieval flowers, including calendula and columbine, as well as the daisies. The third part, the enclosed contemplation garden went in last spring (2001). A grape arbor made of



saplings links this to the kitchen garden. The formal garden is contained on three sides with wood fencing and a stone wall. There is a raised turf bench, flowering beds with period plants, as well as an apple tree and strawberries underneath. (Much of the plant material in the aristocrat's garden was selected because of its religious or romantic symbolism.) At the entrance to this section, and the entire garden, is a medieval cider and a Lady apple tree. The exhibit of medieval field crops, which we believe is the only one in North America, has been planted outside of the garden. The plants in the field plots include grains such as barley, oats and wheat, plus beans, peas and root vegetables. A grove of medieval fruit trees also

accompanies the field crops on the outside of the garden, including many varieties of medieval apple, pear and cherry trees. For us, the garden has been an unqualified success. It offers on-going public recognition to the Center, it keeps the Middle Ages in a very visible place on campus, and it is heavily visited and used. Classes at Penn State visit there, but we also find that school groups are making tours. The Pennsylvania Governor's School uses it, as do local herb classes.

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