



**DAYTRIPPER**

# On a Grand Scale

**When retired architect Tom Brown and his wife, Susan Meisner, started developing 80 acres of land in 1996, they discovered a new outlet for their creativity. SpindleTree Gardens already covers ten acres of impressive ponds and perennial beds, walled gardens, and pavilions**

BY SARAH BROWN

**LET ME BEGIN** this daytripper column with an order. If you are a garden lover, you must, must, **MUST**, fill your car with like-minded friends and make SpindleTree Gardens a full-day excursion. If my in-laws hadn't lived about 20 minutes from this destination garden, I might never have discovered SpindleTree. And that would have been a pity. Because I have visited a lot of gardens — and this one rocks.

So what makes it rock, you ask? First of all, Tom Brown. If you can swing it, definitely show up at 11 a.m. for his daily tour. Brown, it turns out, is a retired Toronto architect with a monumental work ethic and a passion that takes in gardening but

also encompasses landscaping and building. (He estimates that since 1996, he has moved approximately 400 tonnes of stones to build the fences on the property.) What Brown brings to his garden tours is a detailed knowledge of the plantings but also the fascinating back stories on all the elements within the 10-acre site.

Turns out that an airy outdoor pavilion was once a chicken coop, an elaborate greenhouse showcases 18th-century stained-glass windows discovered at a Kingston auction, and the striking sculpture in the potager garden was designed by Brown and fabricated in Toronto. When you get to the 150-foot pond, do ask for the story





of how he managed to get the five-tonne steel bridge installed. Most important of all, ask what Brown is planning next. His large-scale vision, while inspiring, is enough to tire even the most avid of gardeners.

On my July visit, highlights included many varieties of flowering perennials, the rose gardens with more than 70 bushes, and the lush greenery around the main pond. But with recent plantings of more than 7,000 tulip, daffodil, and scilla bulbs, spring at SpindleTree must be lovely.

Brown's wife, Susan Meisner, presides over the Garden Café on the couple's expansive screened-in porch. Homemade soups and sandwiches feature vegetables from the gardens. Take cash, because SpindleTree was not set up to accept credit cards at the time of writing. After lunch, you could probably spend at least another hour strolling the grounds (and taking notes), but the owners are also happy to direct visitors to other nearby attractions — local galleries and gift shops, as well as the picturesque villages of Yarker, Enterprise, and Newburgh.

With spring approaching, I already have my gardening friends lined up for a day trip. They get to see SpindleTree for the first time; I get to check out a new season in the gardens.

**Project manager:** (Facing page, clockwise from top left) Tom Brown says that he has moved about 400 tonnes of stone to build the fences at SpindleTree; the view at the start of the tour; A series of miniature British landmarks forms a croquet course; The couple refer to their greenhouse's style as Miami gothic. (Above left) A view of the 150-foot-long pond (Above right) The plantings complement the rocky terrain

### JUST THE FACTS

**Getting There:** Takes about 2½ hours.

**Hours:** Open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday through Sunday from Mother's Day to Thanksgiving, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Garden tours with the owner, Tom Brown, are available at 11 a.m. sharp and take about 90 minutes. Visitors can also tour the gardens at their own pace using SpindleTree's detailed garden guide.

**Admission:** Adults \$12, seniors and students \$10, children under 12 free. The Garden Café is open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and serves light lunches with homemade soups, hot and cold sandwiches, English tea, and organic salads.

**SpindleTree Gardens, 6248 County Rd. 4, Tamworth, [www.spindletree.ca](http://www.spindletree.ca) END**

