

Visiting local Edens

BY DONNA DIETRICH
Special to The Reporter

From the grand ("Park Place") to the funky ("Villa Verde"), professionally manicured ("Balinese Delight") to lovingly maintained by volunteers ("Sensory Garden"), a variety of styles appear on this year's Upper Keys Garden Club Garden Walk.

The Garden Club has found eight as-yet-unseen gardens to entice the public to this year's Garden Walk fundraiser.

The club has kept the route short — between Tavernier and Key Largo — this year. Garden hostesses will greet visitors at the entrance to each garden and can explain a little about the plantings to be seen; some locations will have

Bromeliads, golden bamboo and areca palm at the 'Balinese Delight' property.

Photos by Donna Dietrich



2009 Garden Walk

When: Friday, Feb. 27, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: Francis Tracy Garden Center, mile marker 94.

There will be a tea party, art exhibit, plant sale and music by Dave Feder. Advance tickets \$15 at Key Largo Floral & Gift, Key Largo Chamber of Commerce, and Cover to Cover Books.

Eight unique landscapes to open for garden walk

owner/gardeners on hand as well.

"Park Place" owners Ellen and John Alderman have used many native varieties in their spacious, 1.3-acre park-like property. Winding paths take the visitor through the palm garden that is punctuated by smaller, colorful plantings. Smaller palms and native succulent ground covers, keeping with the theme but not disturbing the water view, line the pier that extends into the bay.

John Alderman said that they have carefully researched and planted natives, including lignum vitae, gumbo limbo, pigeon plum and assorted palms.

"The entire property was underwater during hurricane Wilma," he said, "but it all came back beautifully."

A sense of humor, bright colors and native plantings are evident in the Keysy style Richard and DeeDee Barreto have used on the six-lot property that has been in their family for a few generations. Native trees, such as buttonwoods and palms, are decorated with everything from brightly painted Styrofoam buoys to orchid plants covered in fabulous blooms.

Richard used a borrowed small tractor recently to clear the adjoining property of everything except native species, and is at work on a whole new garden.

The "Sensory Garden" at Island Dolphin Care is a calming and soothing place to stroll. A butterfly garden area, Japanese Zen garden and water features add a spiritual air to this garden, which was made with donations and Girl Scout labor.

Garden Club members maintain it. Owners Deena and Peter Hoagland said their garden is often used as a little getaway by the parents who bring their children to the facility for therapeutic interaction with the dolphins.

Several of this year's gardens have one thing in common: Joel Cossio. The designer and co-owner of Beach House Gardens in Key Largo has stamped his signature style on many local gardens. Sinuous curves and stripes of different mulches finish off many of the native and tropical plantings he favors.

At his nursery, one of this year's garden walk stops, he displays many of the trees and shrubs he uses on his installations, as well as his "rescued plants." When a homeowner no longer wants a tree or other plant, Cossio digs it up and plants it in the back of his property where he is amassing a "rescue garden."

Cossio has worked on the Buttonwood Bay condominium stops in this year's tour as well as the oceanfront property known as "Balinese Delight." Soft plantings of native beach daisies and cord grasses soften the transition from pool to sandy beach area at Balinese Delight.

Winding paths on each side of the house are planted with palms, under-planted by bromeliads and ground orchids. All were chosen to be salt- and wind-resistant; most have withstood the four tropical storms of 2008, according to Cossio.

At Buttonwood Bay, a tropical rainforest garden and formal entrance gardens are on view. A bayfront fern grotto at Sunset Place and the newly planted "Native Elegance" garden are also on the tour.