



Frequently Asked Questions

Here are the questions we've responded to over the last decade of the Trillium Program.

Nominations and Qualifying Gardens

1. Do I need to know the owner's name to nominate a garden?
 - a. It is not mandatory to include the name in the nomination.
 - b. It is mandatory for the nominated garden owner to provide their name(s) and give permission for photos and for publishing their name(s) and address.
 - c. Please consider nominating a garden address, and we will do the rest.
2. Which gardens qualify for the Trillium Awards?
 - a. There are three criteria:
 - i. Located within the Town of Grimsby.
 - ii. Front yard viewable from the street or accessible via the driveway.
 - iii. The nominated gardener gives permission to release address and pictures of the front garden.
3. What kinds of gardens are included in the Trillium scope?
 - a. All front gardens and balconies of residential, commercial, condominium, rental and town house properties.
 - i. We consider this a public program with an orientation towards inviting the public to view the garden(s). Most condominium complexes on private roads are accessible to the public, so they are included.
 - b. Excluded
 - i. Residences that are not accessible to the public - on private lanes and roads with No Entry signs.
 - ii. Residential or non-residential buildings with locked gates and barriers to entry are generally excluded.
 - c. **Please note** the criteria for residential and non-residential are separate.
 - i. Non-residences include retail, commercial, office, and condominium/apartment complexes.
 - ii. The criteria include looking at the signage and its incorporation of garden elements, reviewing all of the access routes to and from the building(s) for garden elements, and accommodates things such as products on display or "out front" for pickup by the shopper.



4. How do I know if my garden should participate?
 - a. The website at GrimsbyGardenClub.com and the [GGC Facebook page](#) have photos of some of Grimsby's Trillium recipient gardens.
5. If a house is recently purchased, can it receive a Trillium?
 - a. Yes, there are currently no rules disqualifying a garden because it has been recently purchased.
6. Are professionally designed and/or professionally cared for gardens allowed to be nominated?
 - a. The Program allows all front gardens to be nominated - regardless of the designer or caretaker. The program is not similar or comparable to an art competition where copyright can be ascertained and should be adhered to.
 - b. This program recognizes and supports gardeners in all forms. No distinction is made based on ownership or garden activity.
 - i. The front garden may have been designed and maintained by the garden owner(s), house tenants or non-resident staff.
 - ii. They may have help from family or friends.
 - iii. They may use a lawn maintenance service for mowing and trimming, or a garden maintenance service for garden bed maintenance.
 - iv. Landscape architects/firms may build or install garden elements such as driveways and garden beds or other landscape features.
 - v. Tree trimming is often done by professional tree firms.

Judging of Nominated Gardens

7. How do I become a Trillium judge?
 - a. If you are interested in becoming a Trillium judge, contact the Grimsby Garden Club or email at grimsbygardens@gmail.com.
 - b. An orientation and training session is required for judges.
8. Are the gardens all judged at the same time? Can my garden be judged earlier or later?
 - a. In 2026, all gardens will be judged the week of July 6-12.**
9. How long does it take to judge a garden?
 - a. Typical viewing/assessment times are between 10 to 20 minutes for a garden.
 - b. Judges use an assessment checklist and scoring form. They have been trained in making an assessment. The [checklist for assessment is available](#) on the Grimsby Garden Club website.



10. Do the judges walk around the residence's front garden to view it?
 - a. The Trillium scope is the front garden.
 - b. The judges do **not** walk all over the front garden. They view it from the street, the front sidewalk and along the sidewalk or driveway from street to the house. Where there is a long driveway to the house, judges walk up the sidewalk/driveway.
11. Are side gardens included in the judging where there are corner properties?
 - a. The Trillium scope is a **front garden viewable from the street**. Where the side garden is viewable from a straight-on front street view, it will be included. The judges do not walk around the corner and view the side garden when it isn't viewable from the front street view.
12. My garden is on a busy road – how do you assess it?
 - a. The judges will find a place to park so that they can view the garden. If the homeowner allows it, the judges will park in the driveway – judges will ask permission first.
 - b. Grimsby has a particularly difficult constraint on roads up the escarpment. We want to do everything possible to include every garden in the Trillium Program and want to accommodate all the circumstances of our beautiful surroundings. Being able to walk up the residence driveway will generally solve the busy street constraints.
13. How do you decide the residence's front garden – it is where the house number is?
 - a. There may be 2 possible front gardens – the part of the house with the number on it, or the part of the house with the "front door." The judges look to see where the front seems most likely and use that for judging. This accommodates newer housing sections where the house number is on one street with the garage and the front door is around the corner.

Variations in Properties

14. How do judges assess different sized properties – particularly small gardens?
 - a. Judging different sized properties takes skill and expertise. Judges receive training in applying the assessment criteria in a consistent way.
 - b. One might think that a small garden has a better chance of scoring higher. For example, it likely is less effort and time to maintain to high standards. However, in a small plot of 15x20 feet, the effect of each plant and element is critical. One plant out of scale has a medium to high impact. Each item contributes to balance, unity and harmony.
 - c. In a large garden, one plant or element out of place would not have a high impact on the design. In this scenario, groupings and flow of plants and elements are evaluated.



15. Do big houses in newer neighbourhoods have an advantage over other smaller, older houses in older neighbourhoods?
- It can seem like there might be more large, newer houses nominated for Trilliums. Facades, driveways, gardens are made of newer materials and elements, making them appear very pleasant. At the same time, larger houses are generally on smaller lots, and driveways take up a substantial portion of the yard. This can lead to issues of balance, unity and harmony in the design.
16. What if my house isn't as attractive as other houses?
- This is an important question as people are certainly influenced by the style and size of façade of a house in general.
 - There are three activities in judging the garden:
 - ☐ We ask the judges to look at the front yard by putting their hand over the house to evaluate it,
 - ☐ We ask the judges to look at the front yard in context of the house as input to unity, harmony, balance and proportion.
 - ☐ A third element is at play – the quality of maintenance of a house as part of the property. The front walk way, stairs and driveway should be in good repair, as should fences, gates and other external property features.

Assessment Criteria

17. When is a front yard not a garden?
- The answer to this question is based on the definition of a garden. The single feature identifying even the wildest wild garden is control.
 - ☐ **Dictionary.com** tells us that a garden is a plot of ground, usually near a house, where flowers, shrubs, vegetables, fruits, or herbs are cultivated.
 - ☐ The **Cambridge Dictionary** says that a garden is “a piece of land next to and belonging to a house, where flowers and other plants are grown and often containing an area of grass.”
 - ☐ **Wikipedia** says: a garden is a planned space, usually outdoors, set aside for the display, cultivation, or enjoyment of plants and other forms of nature, as an ideal setting for social or solitary human life.
 - The [evaluation criteria](#) will be used to determine the garden's score. The garden can incorporate both natural and manmade materials.
 - ☐ When a front yard is devoid of plant material, (e.g. is only a parking pad) it likely will not fare well in the evaluation.
 - ☐ When the front yard is extremely 'naturalistic' – perhaps it resembles a wood lot or forest, it likely will not fare well in the evaluation.



18. How do I interpret the assessment criteria and the numerical rating scale?
- To get a sense of the assessment rating numbers and what they mean, use the following rule of thumb:
 - 5 – excellent to outstanding
 - 4 – very good
 - 3 – good
 - 2 – fair
 - 1 – poor
 - 0 – not present/missing
19. Are there requirements for a front garden to have flowers (annuals or perennials) to be able to get a Trillium Award?
- There is no mandatory requirement for flowers to be in the garden material. There is the expectation of plant material of various forms.
 - All styles of gardens are encouraged –minimalistic, formal, modern, traditional, Japanese (including Japanese wabi sabi), Rock gardens, Prairie/Meadow. Informal and cottage style, Courtyard, and Country/rural. There is a long and wonderful history of garden styles over the centuries.
 - The garden design theme sets the context for what materials are present. For example:
 - ☐ An “English Cottage” garden will have an abundance of floral material
 - ☐ A “Topiary Scape” may have few or no flowers.
 - ☐ There are “gardens” that surprise the viewer with hardscaping that creates a garden and sculptural effect.
20. Are artificial plants a detriment in the judging criteria?
- The presence of artificial plants can be a solution for a porch or balcony situation where there is low light. In particular, artificial boxwood is sometimes used in these settings. Artificial flowers can integrate as accent features in the landscape or the container. However, the use of artificial flowers and plants as substitutes for living garden material is discouraged.
21. Is artificial turf allowed?
- Artificial turf, trees, bushes, and flowers, fall outside the program’s purpose. Artificial turf is discouraged as a major feature in residential gardens. When artificial turf is used extensively and is noticeable as a feature on the landscape, it may be considered a disqualification.
 - The Grimsby Garden Club recommends natural, living material in a natural environment.



22. How do you decide on the curb appeal score – is it a personal opinion or are there criteria?
- There are a few approaches to the curb appeal score.
 - ☐ The “Wow” moment – this occurs when driving down a street and a front yard garden makes you stop the car to look. It stands out from all around it.
 - ☐ The “BLINK Test” – Sally Cunningham co-author of *Buffalo Garden Style* describes this as “Look at the space for a few seconds - then close your eyes. What did you see? Describe it. The answer will tell you lots about that space: Is there a focal point? Does it have a frame or a backdrop? What colours dominate? Where was your eye directed? The answers are clues to why a design is or is not effective, interesting or special – as opposed to just blah.”
23. Will my front yard score higher if it takes more effort to maintain my garden – there are lots of flowers, plants, shrubs and trees, compared to other gardens with far fewer plants, or with a dominant driveway / hardscape front yard?
- The volume of plant material in the form of plants, perennials, annuals, lawn, and trees, evergreens and shrubs are part of the evaluation, but not the only one.
 - Judging criteria takes into account the elements of curb appeal, scale and flow, harmony and structure, focal areas and leading lines that enhance the design, along with property maintenance.
24. How important is the condition of the grass in my front yard? Does it have to be completely weed-free, and what about brown spots? What happens when there is a drought?
- There are some Trillium winners with excellent to outstanding front lawns.
 - This includes perfectly green, weed-free, nicely mowed to a pleasant height, and separated from the garden and hardscape areas with clear, clean edging.
 - At the same time, there is an increasing concern for our environment – for managing our water usage, and for reducing pesticide and herbicides to protect our birds, insects and our pets.
 - The Trillium Program would hope for a balanced approach to lawn maintenance. There isn’t a mechanism to check for herbicide and pesticide-free lawns in the judging so it is left to residents to be good shepherds of our natural resources.
 - Grass is a living part of the garden and to be cared for. Brown lawns due to drought are allowable, but gardeners should consider the disadvantages.



- i. Summer dormancy occurs when the grass is stressed out by intense heat and drought. It can stay in this dormant state safely for 3-4 weeks without dying. However intense drought will kill lawns over time.
- ii. A gardener should monitor the heat and lack of rain so that the lawn does not die. There are various ground covers that can be used in place of lawns for those who wish to conserve water resources.

25. How do structured gardens compare to more casual gardens in terms of judging results?

- a. There are some exemplary gardens that have received Trillium awards in Grimsby. Structured gardens with complex plantings of shaped and topiary-shaped shrubs and evergreens and casual, native, naturalistic and “English cottage style” gardens.
- b. The differences in the garden theme and style are that formal and structured gardens tend to be neat within in the planting design so that there is ‘space’ between the plants, while casual gardens, plants can ‘spill onto the sidewalk’ or intermingle and create drift effects.

26. How do I know the focal point(s) in gardens? Can there be too many?

- a. Focal points are typically specimen plants, shrubs, garden ornaments, statues, gates, front doors and objects. It is a plant, container, or object that gives you an attractive visual entry point into the garden. It tells you where to look initially and then smoothly directs you to the surrounding garden.
- b. A focal point can be the place where the eye lands as the final resting point. The rule of thumb is the maximum is 5 to 7 things can be focal points in a landscape. Typically, there is a dominant focal point and others are subordinate.

27. Can a garden be too neat?

- a. This is an interesting question, and generally relates to preferences.
 - i. When hedges and bushes are clipped and sheared so closely that they get “burn” and are brown, this becomes a detriment in the maintenance assessment.
 - ii. Additionally, where the maintenance is dominant over the garden’s design, the garden’s unity and harmony would be lesser, so a lower score might result.
 - iii. As we attend more to biodiversity and sustainability, the neatness of the garden may be of less interest than the garden’s appeal to pollinators, birds, and other inhabitants besides the garden owner.