



CHANGING GARDEN—Ken Avery, chief gardener at the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden, is shown here in the forest area of the garden. Many of the plants that once grew there were cut down. Other plants favoring shade no longer do well there.

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Plants had it made in tall elms' shade

CAROLINE YOUNG
Minneapolis Star Staff Writer

THE GARDEN used to have a variety of trees shading the bog. It was cool and quiet, and the wind rustled through the leaves. It was like walking into another world.

But Dutch elm disease has taken its toll. In the past few years the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden and Bird Sanctuary has lost almost all the elm trees that provided that atmosphere. Ken Avery, chief gardener, said there are only 10 left in the garden out of more than 175.

"They were wild, full-grown trees," Avery said. "Last year we lost 30 or 40. One winter we lost 80 elms. We're down to the point where there are almost none now ... Even the parking lot is affected. This year we've already lost

The Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden and Bird Sanctuary has lost almost all its elms. Of more than 175, only 10 remain. The loss of the trees is changing the garden.

two elms. There are only six up there."

The loss of the trees is changing the garden. Plants that favor shade don't grow well, those that need sun are moving in. Bird species that favor open areas are moving in and those that need trees, such as wood ducks, may be diminishing.

Avery, who has worked at the garden for 24 years, has mixed feelings about the change, although he still thinks the garden is lovely.

"It used to be just beautiful," he said. "It does not compare with what it was. It has to go back to what it used to be: it's a highly disturbed area."

"It's a tragedy in many ways," he said. "I go into mourning over it. The flowers are not as nice as

they used to be. But by the same token, if a person is interested in nature, he has to be interested in what is happening. It's an experiment I wouldn't have the nerve to conduct."

He said he knows it will be a long time before the garden returns to its shaded state. "Everything happens in nature in 1, 2, 10, 20 years," he said. "I'm used to things taking a long time."

Avery has the kind of tan that comes with working outdoors. His arms are covered with scratches, his brown pants have dirt stains on the knees.

The garden he tends was begun in 1907 by Eloise Butler, a botany teacher, who received permission from the park board to start a wildflower garden. She served as its first full-time curator from 1911 to her death in 1915. Her ashes were scattered about the 20-acre garden and bird sanctuary.

The 13-acre woodland and bog portion of the garden, located on the west edge of Minneapolis between Hwy. 12 and Glenwood Ave., along Wirth Parkway, is a tangle of small trees, bushes, plants, flowers. Chipmunks and squirrels scamper around the wooded beds. Vines and mossy ferns cover the ground and the garden is riddled with tree stumps that were once all growing elms.

A few years ago, Avery and the University of Minnesota experimented on the dying elms. They treated dead trees that had already been cut down with chemicals to prevent the beetles from spreading to other elms. The logs were left strewn on the garden floor to leave it as natural looking as possible.

But many of the logs have been removed because people started to complain that the garden looked like a battleground.

Avery and Mary Maguire Lerman, the coordinator of the horticulture programs for the parks board, said the board is supplying other shade trees to replace the elms. They are planting swamp oak, butternut, balsam fir and black ash, but are not planning to replant any elms.

"People have to be crazy to plant elms now," Lerman said. "This disease is going to be around for awhile." She said it will take from 15 to 20 years for the garden to have another heavy shade cover such as the elms provided.

The lack of elms in the bog is changing plant distribution. Some plants started to die when they were exposed to the sun and Avery had to move them to a shadier part of the garden.

He said the hepatica, a tiny wildflower, has grown very well the past few years, but "it doesn't take a lot of sun. They still seem to be there, though."

Other plants that do not grow well in the shade have flourished. "The blackberry and raspberry bushes are a terrible problem," he said. "They are coming in and are difficult to control, they're growing everywhere."

Other plants that usually grow in unattended fields also are appearing. "We didn't have one,



Star illustration by Lynette Arnold

NEW GROWTH—Vegetation now grows in an area of the Eloise Butler garden once shaded by elm trees.

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five years ago,” Avery said. “They’re one of the things that are coming in since the trees are gone.”

Other plants beginning to thrive in the woodland area, because of the sun, are the silver nightshade vine, the beardslip and the groundnut. The nightshade vine is a common ground weed that springs up and dies annually, Lerman said.

The beardslip is a fast-growing bush that eventually develops into a tree. She said it will be used to provide some shade in the garden while the other trees are growing, then it will be chopped down and removed.

The ground nut is a wild bean.

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MEMORY OF AN ELM—Mary Maguire Lerman, coordinator of the horticulture programs for the parks board, looked over the stump of an elm that had stood in the garden. The board is supplying shade trees to replace the elms.

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