

The Hawthorn

2024

Holiday Bazaar Returns!

All of us here at Merryspring are thrilled to announce the return of our Holiday Bazaar on **Saturday, Nov. 30, and Sunday, Dec. 1**. This special fundraiser will take place at the Nature Center on 30 Conway Road in Camden from **10:00 am to 4:00 pm** each day.

Merryspring's Holiday Bazaar was loved for many years, and this year it will be better than ever. We will have especially beautiful and imaginatively decorated wreaths, both evergreen and grapevine. They will utilize lots of natural elements, but rest assured that some will have plenty of bling. We are making our indoor and outdoor arrangements in unique containers — logs, wood slices, and cylindrical vases trimmed with pine cones. Other arrangements will include Danica candles.

You will also find paperwhite bulb gardens as well as bagged bulbs, balsam in burlap pouches, soy votives and hand-dipped candles, holiday cookies, individual mini chocolate and peppermint bundt cakes, and scones.

Merryspring's Holiday Bazaar Hours:

Saturday, Nov. 30 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Sunday, Dec. 1 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm



Nature-themed gifts of all kinds include adorable pine cone angels and birch bark bird house ornaments, as well as earrings, soaps, and puzzles. Eco cloths, heirloom tomato seeds, gardening tools, and garden gloves round out our offerings.

On center stage — as a special feature — will be a homemade hot cocoa bar with an array of add-ins such as malted milk balls, English toffee, salted milk chocolate caramels, peppermint sticks, marshmallows, and real whipped cream.

We will also be having a holiday raffle, the prize being an array of fabulous local products and gift certificates for a combined value of \$300. An added treat: Resa Randolph, a talented and popular midcoast musician, will be playing the fiddle for everyone on Saturday, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

We are glad to be back. Hope to see you at our Holiday Bazaar.



About 135 members came to Merryspring's 50th Anniversary celebration party under the big tent.

50th Anniversary Celebration

Merryspring celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2024 with a three-day extravaganza in July that drew a total of almost 800 participants.

It began on Thursday, July 18, when Merryspring was a featured attraction on the Camden Garden Club's 76th Annual Garden Tour. More than 500 people came to the Nature Center to "ooh" and "aah" at our beautiful gardens, including the rose garden, the herb garden, and the colorful daylily garden.



Long-time friends of Merryspring, Kay Ouradnik and Gail Palmer.

On the following day, July 19, we held a special Members-Only Dinner Party under a large tent in the middle of our annual and perennial border gardens. About 135 people attended the event, which featured music by the Bay Chamber Jazz Ensemble and an entertaining "walk" through Merryspring's history by guest speaker, and former executive director, Kerry Hardy. *(Continued on page 3)*

Merryspring Nature Center

P.O. Box 893, Camden, ME 04843
 Tel: (207) 236-2239
 Fax: (207) 230-0663
 Email: info@merryspring.org
www.merryspring.org

Mission Statement

Merryspring’s mission is to practice, teach, and advocate sound principles of ecology, conservation, and horticulture in order to protect our natural environment and to provide natural landscapes and cultivated areas for public enjoyment.

Hours of Operation

The park is open free of charge from dawn to dusk every day of the year. Our offices and library are open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., or by appointment.

Membership Levels

Individual	\$50—74
Family	\$75—99
Friend	\$100—249
Donor	\$250—499
Steward	\$500—999
Conservator	\$1,000—2,499
Partner	\$2,500—4,999
Patron	\$5,000 or more

Keeping in Touch

You can sign up for our eUpdates at www.merryspring.org to receive the latest news on programs and events. Or you can visit Merryspring’s Facebook page, where you can check on upcoming events. Please go to www.tinyurl.com/merryspring-facebook/.

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Toni Goodridge, Managing Director
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President’s Message

How You Can Help

By Ray Andresen

Merryspring relies on memberships, sponsorships, fund-raisers, foundation grants, merchandise sales, and donations from generous people like you to provide our Environmental Education Outreach, Tuesday Talks, Weekend Workshops, Summer Ecology Camps, and other services at little or no cost for participants like you.

We believe our work is important to our community – people of all ages and walks of life who come here to learn, explore our gardens and trails, or simply enjoy the incredible diversity of nature Merryspring offers.

But we need your financial support to provide these services. And we would greatly appreciate your help in spreading our message to your family, neighbors, and friends. Here’s how you can help:

- Make a donation. If you donate \$50 or more, you will automatically become a member for one year.
- Become a member at one of our programs.
- If you own a business or work for one, look into becoming a business sponsor for our programs.
- Go to our online store to buy environmentally friendly products. More products and colors are on the way.
- Join us on Facebook & Instagram. Please like, share, and comment on our posts.
- When you visit Merryspring, you can make a donation in the office or the donation boxes. One is outside the office and the other is next to the Hexagon by the gardens.

Thank you for your continued support.

Jo Maxwell Joins Board



Jo Maxwell

Jo Maxwell of Rockport is the newest member of Merryspring’s Board of Trustees. A former chef and restaurant owner on Martha’s Vineyard, Jo was also a textile artist and a youth educator at the Polly Hill Arboretum and The Martha’s Vineyard Museum. Moving to midcoast Maine with her husband, David, and two dogs, Lucy and Skeeter, Jo became a regular volunteer for Coastal Mountains Land Trust as well as Merryspring. Her restaurant experience and energy proved invaluable in the planning and execution of our 50th anniversary celebration in July, and she has been the driving force behind the return of our Holiday Bazaar (see page 1).

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Hosta Garden at Merryspring.

Endowment Fund Ensures Our Future

Merryspring has a permanent Endowment Fund to ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy the wonders of nature being exhibited and taught at your Nature Center.

If you would like to make a bequest that will increase this fund, please consult your financial and legal advisors on what method would be in your best interest and would fulfill your wishes. For more information, please call (207) 236-2239 or email info@merryspring.org.

Redesigned Website Launched in 2024

During the fall of 2023 and winter of 2024, Charlie Costello, Melissa Thornton, and John Fromer completed the process of redesigning Merryspring’s website, which was launched in early March. Many hours were devoted to examining how our audience used the website and what new ideas would improve the user experience.

First and foremost was improving the calendar, which is what visitors click on the most. Second was updating images on all pages and reviewing and updating text as needed. Third was the addition of our online store for environmentally friendly products (where possible). Another page was devoted to covering the different activities for our 50th anniversary in 2024. Finally, the educational outreach page was upgraded to show the complete list of programs available.

For people new to Merryspring, this was an opportunity to describe the park in words and images. Our goal was to get people excited about visiting Merryspring for a hike, activity, or event. We have also increased our social media presence by adding Instagram to our existing Facebook page. Please like and subscribe to both and tell your friends.



The Daylily Garden makes a striking image on our redesigned website.

50th Anniversary Celebration

(continued from page 1)

And then on Saturday, July 20, Merryspring had a Free Family Fun & Open Garden Day at the park that attracted approximately 150 adults and children for a day of special events, entertainment, and a pie social. The day began with a variety of children’s activities under the big tent as well as building forts and fairy houses in our Fairy Village. At the same time, musical entertainment was provided by the Midcoast Ukes. Then came a special demonstration in the Hexagon of the Chewonki Owls. And, finally, the three-day celebration culminated with our Pie Social — a first in Merryspring’s 50-year history.



Top & bottom left: a close look at a Chewonki saw-whet owl delights the audience. Top center & right: a rapt audience under the tent listens as speaker Kerry Hardy takes them back 50 years to Merryspring’s beginnings. Bottom right: Merryspring’s first Pie Social was a big hit!



First Tomato Tasting

On September 14th, Merryspring Nature Center hosted its First Annual Tomato Tasting. Charlie Costello and John Fromer, growers of a variety of tomatoes, came up with the idea for Merryspring. It was different, exciting, and who doesn't love tasting a delicious, new tomato.

On a warm and beautiful day, the tasting began at noon and continued until 3:00 in the afternoon. Attended by over 50 tomato lovers, there were 30 varieties of tomatoes to taste, selected from a list of over 65 varieties. They were grown by Charlie, John, and members of the Maine Heirloom Seed Working Group: Heron Breen, Donna Dryek, Neil Lash, and Amy LeBlanc. Jo Maxwell and David Joyce were a great help in prepping all the tomatoes.



Tasty tomatoes (foreground) await the taste test.

The event began with talks about growing tomatoes by Heron, Donna, Amy, Charlie, and John. Topics included breeding tomatoes, favorite varieties, seed saving, and best growing practices.

Tomatoes ranged in size from tiny, pea-sized Spoon tomatoes, to large ones like Marmalade, some very funny colored ones like Black Strawberry, and a variety of Romas. Most of the tomatoes were heirloom varieties and, as a result, people were encouraged to save the seeds from the tomatoes they liked to grow for next year.

After the tasting, Amy led a demonstration on saving tomato seeds. There was also a raffle for prizes donated by Seed Savers Exchange (seedsavers.org) out of Dekorah, Iowa. And now we look forward to our second annual tasting on Saturday, September 13, 2025. Mark your calendar.



A fairy house in our Fairy Village

Our Fairy Village Is A Magical Place

Have you been to Merryspring's Fairy Village? It's a magical place in the middle of the forest that children of all ages just love. Hundreds and hundreds of kids have played and worked together there, building little fairy houses and forts. They're everywhere! Some are large enough — like the Wizards House — that 15 kids can easily fit in. Some are tiny with little gardens and a fence. Other forts have so many sticks you can't see inside. Little piles of sticks that used to be a small fairy house now lie on the ground, maybe knocked down by a deer. Not to worry, they will probably find their way into a new fairy house!

One of the best things about our Fairy Village is its proximity to the Vernal Pool. In spring, large classes divide up with one group at the Vernal Pool and the other at Fairy Village. Then, they switch. Works like magic!



Children busy building a Wizard's House.

Fairy Village is also a hit at summer camp. The kids run around, calling out to each other about their building projects. They built a school, bank, a mayor's office and a hospital. Pretty amazing!

Fairy Village was also the first part of the Saturday Celebration for Merryspring's 50th anniversary. Amy Rollins, a Fairy House expert, was the host and helped kids learn to make fairy houses like the one pictured here. See if you can spot the fairy in the top left image. Look closely. It's sitting at its little table ready for a yummy meal!

Another Year of Changes for Merryspring's Gardens

By Denise DeSpirito

Each year the gardens at Merryspring shift and change, and 2024 was no exception.

After last year's excavation of some overgrown invasive areas, it was nice to start this season off with a new pollinator area to plant. This year it was filled with a variety of annual flowers from bright orange *Tithonia* to dark maroon *Coreopsis* and a whole section devoted to partridge pea. Partridge pea is a wonderful native annual cover crop that can be used in drier areas. It has a small yellow flower, feathery sensitive foliage that closes up with certain conditions and maroon seed pods that pop open come fall. Being a legume, it fixes soil nitrogen but also is a benefit to the garden as a host to many pollinators. At one point in the summer, its flowers were so loved by bees I heard their buzzing across the garden.

Luckily, it seems our excavation project was a success, and none of the unwanted invasive weeds returned. In this coming May, we will plant this area with native perennials. If this is something you are interested in helping with, please check out our volunteer page on the website to get involved. We are grateful for the many helping hands we had this summer to tidy up the gardens for our 50th Anniversary Party and the Camden Garden Club Tour.

When people are new to visiting Merryspring, they often speculate about what the large metal circular piece is that sits near our greenhouse. Left over from the property's past as a sawmill, it is actually the perfect garden planter. For many years it has been planted with hops, but a variety of insects kept munching away at them (even after my attempts to keep them away by using nematodes); and with this summer's many events it seemed like a great time to switch things up. I freshly planted it with a combination of annuals that had a 'Ballerina Purple' *Datura metel* peering through the circle center. I have talked about these intriguing plants in my Backyard Herbalism series because they are poisonous but rich with magical history. It was paired with some lavender *Cleome*, 'Violet Queen' *Alyssum* and a hyacinth bean I unraveled from growing up the deck at my house.

The back perennial bed that was revamped and planted last fall also started to come into itself this season with two new and different bearded irises to add to the already stunning iris collection. Merryspring also has a combination of 'Ice Ballet' swamp milkweed, *Papaver rupifragum* 'Tangerine,' bee balm 'Sugar Buzz Pink Frosting,' and other lovely perennials. The backdrop for this bed is our new Tree and Shrub border, which made it through its first season with only a small amount of damage due to wildlife. The addition of some spicebush, paw paws, and sweet fern helped fill out the open space. Next year the Tree and Shrub Border will get plant tags and a few more additions.

For the upcoming 2025 season, we hope to redo our Children's Garden by adding a few more raised beds in an area more protected from wildlife. The Children's Garden is a place where children can taste veggies and herbs and is used during our summer camp program. If you are connected to a homeschool group or other children's group that would be interested in helping tend and maintain this area, please let us know.



A metal boiler piece left over from the sawmill days before Merryspring is now used as a planter.

Garden Volunteers Needed

We are always looking for extra hands in the garden. Hours and times are flexible and we have tasks for all different skill sets, especially early in the spring. Look for info about a seasonal volunteer orientation come April. If you are ready to commit to a larger volunteer position and have some experience, please check out the Native Plant Steward position described below.

Volunteer Steward for Native Plants

Tasks include:

- Weeding and maintaining newly restored Native Tree and Shrub Border.
- Assisting in installation and labeling of new plant tags in new native areas.
- Helping Install and maintain new Native Pollinator Garden.
- Collecting herbarium specimens of native plant species on Merryspring property to catalog and add to Merryspring's herbarium collection.

Position is late May to early September; 10-15 hours per month. Requires bending, digging, some wheelbarrowing. This is a volunteer position.

2024 Education Summary

By John Fromer

2024 was a busy and exciting year for Educational Outreach to students and programs for adults.

Educational Outreach

As of this writing, more than 1,100 students received 114 hours of nature-based education with an increased geographic area that now includes St. George out to Hope and north to Searsport.

The “Maine Mammals – Moose to Mice” program was well received and was improved by using trail cameras and making plaster casts of animal tracks caught on camera.

Other popular Outreach topics included phenology, tree age and tree identification, seed starting and saving, invasive species identification and removal, and pollination. Water test strips with 16 different tests were used to check the Merry Spring (great water!), Vernal Pool and Goose River. A microscope was connected to an

iPad so students could look closely at spotted salamanders from the Vernal Pool. The kids were taught chemistry with experiments like testing how water pH changes with different kinds of leaves, performing and reviewing a soil test, food coloring in milk to see how soap interacts with water molecules, and Mentos in Diet Coke to produce carbon dioxide.

In the spring, the 850 daffodils planted by the RAMS (Rivers Alternative Middle School) in 2023 bloomed for an extended period in our North Meadow. The RAMS students also learned about honeybees and began constructing and painting bee hives for installation next June. The hives will be located in the South Meadow, and honey produced by the Merryspring bees will be available in our Gift Shop.



Children search for insects during the annual Bug Safari.

Almost 100 students were presented with information on the Total Solar Eclipse that took place on April 8, 2024. This event, seen by many here in Maine, was the height of astronomical excitement for many in 2024. A presentation on the subject was also given to a total of 100 residents of Quarry Hill Retirement Community in Camden and Penobscot Shores Retirement Community in Belfast.

Programming for Adults and Families

In all, a total of more than 1,230 adults participated in 80 programs during the year. These included our ongoing series of Tuesday Talks, Weekend Workshops, and Watercolor Classes. Program highlights included an apple tree pruning workshop with Jason White, the archaeological history of Merryspring with Harbour Mitchell, garden talks by Denise DeSpirito, and a new Tomato Tasting event in September (see page 4) attended by more than 50 people. There were popular bird talks by Bob Duchesne, Nick Lund, and Don Reimer; river talks by Tim Shaw and Tim Caverly; and climate talks by Jeremy Bell, Aaron Englander and Sean Birkel. Kirk Gentalen led the winter tracking workshop and gave a talk on fishers.

The Free Family Friday programs were well attended and included standards like the Bug Safari, Exploring Owl Pellets, the ever-popular Fairy Village, four seasonal Ecology Walks, and more. Other interesting programs included Greg Marley’s Mushroom Foraging and Identification workshop, Jock Robie’s Worm Bin programs, and our Daylily Day with Susan Shaw.

All in all, it was a very busy year!



Kirk Gentalen leads a tracking workshop at Merryspring.

Summer Camps

Our two weeks of Summer Ecology Camps, coordinated with Louisa Crane of Knox-Lincoln Soil and Water Conservation District, were exciting fun for our young campers. Liz Cunningham and Marcella Christensen, both artists, advised us on improving the nature journals, which the kids immensely enjoyed. Each day had a theme like gardening, trees, mammals, and exploring trails at Merryspring. A monarch butterfly—by pure chance—even participated in the Fly Like a Butterfly game!

Total Solar Eclipse

2025 Winter-Spring Calendar



Bronze Sponsor:



Tuesday Talks at Noon

- Jan 7 Ornamental Herb Garden Design—*John Fromer*
- Jan 14 Breakwater Birds—*Tim Shaw*
- Jan 21 Japanese Gardens—*Lee Sligh*
- Jan 28 Maine’s Terrestrial Invasive Plant Do-Not-Sell List—*Gary Fish*
- Feb 4 Mnemonic Ecologies—*Sonja Pleck*
- Feb 11 Creatures of Habit—*Kirk Gentalen*
- Feb 18 Aquatic Invasive Plants: Stop the Spread—*Brett Willard*
- Feb 25 Invasive Species Identification—*Louisa Crane*
- Mar 4 Maine’s Spring Birds—*Nick Lund*
- Mar 11 Bees—*Dick Vermeulen*
- Mar 18 New to Gardening in Maine?—*John Fromer*
- Mar 25 Pesticide Practices & IPM—*Hillary Peterson*
- Apr 1 Ice Age Cycle—*Sean Birkel*
- Apr 8 A Global Comparison of Squirrel Temperature Regulation Physiology—*Eric Brown*
- Apr 15 About Dahlias—*John Fromer*
- Apr 22 Gulf of Maine Birds—*Bob Duchesne*
- Apr 29 Kitchen Gardens History & Design—*John Fromer*

All talks will be via the Zoom platform and free to all. Please use this [Zoom link](#) to attend. The link can also be found on our website

Worm Bin Harvest with Jock Robie January 14 6:00—8:00 pm.
Free to all. Turn kitchen waste into rich soil amendments using worms.

Free Family Fridays

- March 14—Late Winter Ecology Walk**—Find signs of winter turning to spring.
- April 25—Spring Ecology Walk**—Visit the Vernal Pool; listen and watch for migrating birds.
- July 18—Bug Safari**—Search Merryspring’s gardens for insects; learn how to identify your findings. Nets provided.
- July 25—Tree Identification & Age**—Learn how to identify native trees by their leaves, buds, and bark.
- August 1—Wildlife Detective**—Use your detective skills to solve nature mysteries. Figure out clues hidden in animal tracks, skins, and skulls.
- August 8—Fairy Village**—Create tiny little fairy houses or great big ones using natural ingredients at hand in the woods.
- August 15—Exploring Owl Pellets**—Learn about Maine’s native owls; discover the secrets inside the pellets they leave behind.
- August 22—Evening Eco Walk**—Owls, bats, and more—learn what plants and animals do at night. *This Walk begins at 8:00 p.m.*

Free Family Fridays begin at 10:00 am (except 8/22). Space is limited. Pre-registration required.

Weekend Workshops



Pruning Apple Trees

with *Jason White*

Saturday, February 22

9:00 am—12:00 pm \$40M/\$45NM
Increase yield and new growth.



Seed Starting

with *John Fromer*

Saturday, April 5

10:00 am—12:00 pm \$40M/\$45NM
Start seeds indoors to take home.



Growing Great Pumpkins

with *Charlie Costello*

Saturday, April 19

10:00—11:30 am \$10M/\$15NM
Learn the secrets to growing a giant.



Dividing Perennials

with *John Fromer*

Saturday, May 3

9:00 am—12:00 pm \$40M/\$45NM
Learn to divide established plants.



Bart Wood Memorial Bird Walk

with *Don Reimer*

Saturday, May 10

7:30—9:00 am Free to all.
Look/listen for spring-migrating birds.

Merryspring Gratefully Acknowledges Your 2023 Contributions

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Cactus blooming in Merryspring's Rock Garden.

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COMPLIMENTARY MEMBERSHIPS: Kitisha Croce Family; Denise DeSpirito Family; Jan McCoy & Dylan Fuller Family; Bob Adler & Anne-Marie Nolan; Jock & Susan Robie; Brett Willard.

GIFT MEMBERSHIPS: Ellen Began; Mary Jane Schotte; Michelle Terry.

GIFTS IN KIND: Wendy & Ray Andresen; C. Paul Denckla; Eric Evans; John & Kathy Fromer; Dominic & Liz Gioia Family; Karen Grove; Nancy Lubin; Marjorie E. Maxcy; Virginia E. Noble; Wendy & Bruce Reinemann; Carl Small; Herbert Hawes & Sons.



Native Maine blueberries

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS: Robert Doyle; Zella Walker; Cathleen Zocchi; Melanie Williams.

FOUNDATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: In 2023, our programs received crucial financial support from a variety of organizations, municipalities, and private foundations. We thank the following institutional supporters for their help during the past year: Anonymous Donor; Fisher Charitable Foundation; Maine Daylily Society; Maine Timberlands Charitable Trust; Margaret E. Burnham Charitable Trust; Nellie Leaman Taft Foundation; Rockland Rotary Club; Rotary Club of West Bay; The Aldermere Foundation; The Leonard C. & Mildred F. Ferguson Foundation; The Reny Charitable Foundation; Town of Camden; Warren Field and Garden Club.

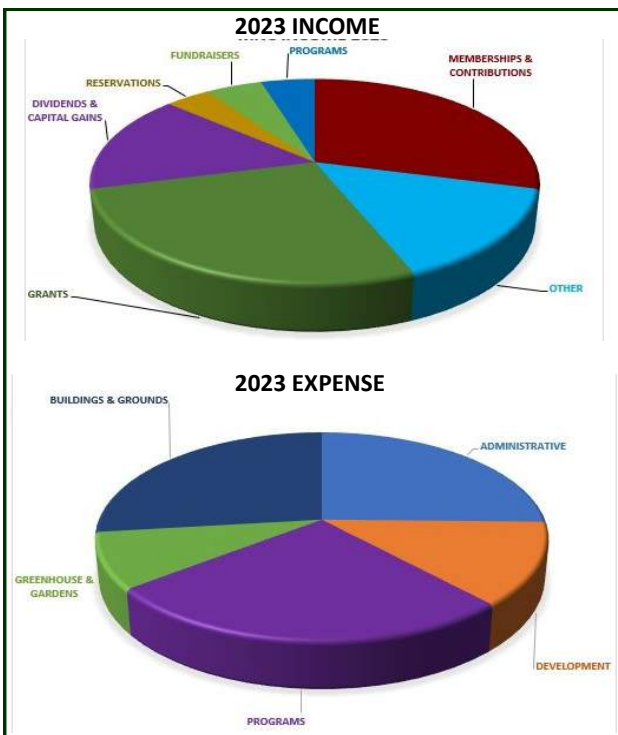
2023 Business Support

Merryspring is very grateful for the support the local business community gave us in 2023. If you appreciate Merryspring, we hope you will extend your thanks to these businesses that help fund our work and provide valuable goods and services to our community.

BUSINESS PARTNER (\$1,000 or more): Camden Riverhouse Hotel; Scholz & Barclay Architecture.

BUSINESS STEWARD (\$250 - \$999): Allen Insurance and Financial; First National Bank; Hannaford Super Market; TREEKEEPERS LLC Johnson's Arboriculture.

BUSINESS FRIEND (\$100 - \$249): BUSINESS GIFTS IN KIND: Fernwood Nursery; Plants Unlimited; Seasons Downeast Designs.



Dear Members and Friends of Merryspring

We are fortunate to have so many friends and members of Merryspring who, year-in and year-out, support their Nature Center with gifts of time and money. You are the reason Merryspring exists and continues to serve our Midcoast community.

Merryspring has an annual operating budget of about \$230,000 to cover salaries, educational programs, supplies, utilities, maintenance of our gardens and grounds, and improvements to our woodland trails. As you can see by the pie chart shown here, a major part of our funding comes from member contributions as well as grants and dividends from our endowment.

So, as we finish celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2024, we wish to thank all of you listed on these pages for your contributions in 2023 and for your continuing support again this year.

On behalf of the Merryspring trustees and staff, THANK YOU.

Ray Andresen
 President, Merryspring Board of Trustees



P.O. Box 893
Camden, ME 04843



Reserve Merryspring for Your Event

Remember to think of Merryspring when you or your friends are planning a wedding, memorial service, meeting, or other special event. Each year several weddings, receptions, and meetings take place at Merryspring. Conveniently located yet away from the noise and bustle of the towns of Camden and Rockport, Merryspring offers stunning gardens and an outdoor hexagon perfect for small ceremonies. A well-tended lawn bordered by flower beds filled with spectacular color from June through September will accommodate a tent for up to 200 guests. And the meeting room inside the Ross Center is spacious and airy.

