

DIG iN

FALL/WINTER 2026
NEWSLETTER



THE GARDENS
ON SPRING CREEK

CALENDAR OF CLASSES AND EVENTS



Read and Seed – Mondays and
Tuesdays (ages two to four years old)



Tai Chi in The Gardens – Saturdays
through November (weather permitting)

Saturday, Sept. 26

Bonsai Staging

Awakening with Nature: Fall
Meditation and Breathwork

Garden Peace Poles

Saturday, Oct. 3

Easy Backyard Mushrooms

Saturday, Oct. 10

Mindfulness in Nature

Oct. 22-25

Pumpkins on Parade

Saturday, Nov. 7

Scenes from a Cemetery: Plant
Edition

Saturday, Nov. 14

Natural Lip Balm

Saturday, Nov. 21

Lotion Bars Made Easy

Bioactive Terrarium Workshop

Dec. 11-23, 26 & 27

Garden of Lights

Visit FortCollins.gov/Gardens
or call (970) 416-2486 for more
information and to register. If
a class is sold out, you can put
yourself on a waitlist by emailing
our team at GardensEducation@FortCollins.gov.



THE GARDENS
ON SPRING CREEK

All classes are subject to change. If a class is sold out, you can put yourself on a
waitlist by emailing our team at GardensEducation@fortcollins.gov





DEAR GARDENS MEMBERS,

As we approach the transition from summer's long, dry heat to the cooler, and hopefully wetter, conditions of fall, we look forward to shifting our focus from weeding and maintenance to one of our favorite times of the gardening season: fall planting! With temperatures beginning to drop from triple digits and upper 90s into the mid-to-low 80s, a long-awaited window of opportunity presents itself to pop even more plants in the ground before the chill of winter sets in. This fall, the Horticulture Team is looking forward to some new installations and enhancements to our gardens.

One project in the works is a large-scale planting in the Northwest Grove to incorporate a stronger, more cohesive selection of woody shrub species and perennials. Plant selections and layout are being spearheaded by planting designer and horticulturist Lauren Springer and will tie in the dense upper canopy with a designed woodland understory, binding the garden together. This area consists heavily of dense, dry shade and will feature plants carefully selected to thrive in these challenging conditions.

Another enhancement currently underway is connected directly to the Outdoor Kitchen, where we've expanded the existing lawn to create an intentional space for ceremonies and celebrations that can accommodate 150 guests in a more private and intimate setting. This new installation was made possible thanks to a generous donation from Diane Crews and has been a collaboration with members from the Horticulture and Events staff as well as CityGive. This space will be perfect for weddings and other private rentals, featuring a lush backdrop of conifers, annual planters and elegant stonework designed to frame these special occasions.

On your next visit, make sure to check out what progress we've made in these areas and keep an eye out for anything new to come. You never know what we'll create next! A crevice garden near the entrance, designed by Kenton Seth, perhaps (stay tuned for more on this!)? We hope you find yourselves inspired by what our Horticulture Team works so hard to create and display as we continue to innovate and enhance our gardens. Thank you all for your passion and support for The Gardens, and may the rain and cooler weather find their way to yours!



DILLON HANCOCK
Operations and Horticulture Supervisor
The Gardens on Spring Creek



Respite for Wildlife Amid Urban Sprawl



*By Andrew Scott,
Horticulturist*

Habitat loss continues to be a major threat to wildlife and biodiversity worldwide, but especially in and around cities. As these human habitats continue to creep into wildlands and even rural areas, it pushes wildlife further and further out from their native range, either forcing them to adapt to these urban environments or compete with other species for the remaining territory. Ideally, habitat fragmentation wouldn't be happening, but there are actions that can somewhat mitigate the problem. We're fortunate enough in Fort Collins to have over 43,000 acres of natural areas to offer some respite to wildlife, and you too can help create more pockets of habitat by being intentional with your home garden.

To garden for wildlife, you have to put yourself in the shoes — erm, paws — of wildlife. Food, water, and shelter are the major elements of habitat that all wildlife need, while space and arrangement of these three elements are what actually creates the habitat. There could be hundreds of flowers and puddles and roosts, but if they're all spread out 10 miles from each other, that giant habitat won't do a butterfly any good. Luckily, by bringing these elements to your home garden, you automatically create a central habitat for wildlife to visit!

Water forms the basis of any ecosystem. Small animals like insects may be able to get away with sipping dewdrops, but for larger animals like mammals, birds and amphibians, larger depressions like birdbaths, ephemeral puddles or water features will be much more helpful. Adding some rocks to these allows insects to have a place to

land and drink too, but it's a good idea to have the water be moving so it doesn't attract mosquitos.

Next to water, native plants are the basis of a thriving backyard ecosystem. Think back to the food webs you learned about in your second grade science class: the plants attract insects, which attract birds and toads, which attract birds of prey and foxes, and so on. Wildlife has evolved alongside these native plants for millennia, so if you take away the base of the web, the rest of it crumbles.

It's important to consider a variety of plant species in order to stretch food sources across the season; for example, pasqueflowers, columbines and bulbs bloom for spring nectar and pollen, coneflowers and tickseeds in the summer, and asters and goldenrods carrying wildlife through autumn into winter. Bees make a beeline to yellow, purple, blue and white blooms with "landing pads" for them, while butterflies are also attracted to pinks and oranges, especially with tubular flowers they can get their long proboscis into.

With butterflies come their caterpillars, as well as other yummy bugs like grasshoppers, beetles and flies that form the basis of a backyard food web. These insects will attract insectivorous birds like sparrows, chickadees, swallows and flickers, but birds like finches, doves and jays are also attracted to yards with ample berries and seeds for them to pluck off plants. Hummingbirds, however, feed mainly on nectar and go for tubular flowers that fit their long tongues, especially bright red or orange blooms that can quickly be picked out as they zip by.

As with different bloom times for season-long nectar, it's important to have plants with fruits and seeds ripening at different times. Spring and summer fruits in general are higher in sugar and good for quick bursts of energy, while fall ripening fruits are higher in fats that will sustain animals in late autumn and winter, especially if they need to migrate elsewhere.



Because wildlife depends on plant leftovers to make it through these lean times, a functioning backyard ecosystem also happens to be lower maintenance for you than a polished and manicured garden. Leaving spent flower stalks keeps food for birds and shelter for boring insects, while leaving dead leaves on the ground, a dormant bunchgrass, or that brush pile in the corner creates insulated shelter for other dormant insects, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

It should go without saying, but creating a garden to attract wildlife will attract many types, including species some consider pests, like rodents, rabbits, raccoons, deer, snakes and spiders. As long as they aren't getting into your home, seeing these visitors pass through your garden demonstrates that your efforts to attract wildlife are in fact working! While humans do create lots of problems for wildlife, one of our greatest attributes is that we are also problem solvers and any step you take to transform your backyard is a welcome addition to our shared urban landscapes.



Bee and butterfly nectar plants

Yarrow | *Achillea millefolium*

Milkweeds | *Asclepias* spp.

Asters | *Aster* and *Symphyotrichum* spp.

Purple coneflower | *Echinacea purpurea*

Rocky Mountain blazing star | *Liatris ligulistylis*

Bee balm | *Monarda* spp.

Beardtongues | *Penstemon* spp.

Upright prairie coneflower | *Ratibida columnifera*

Black-eyed Susan | *Rudbeckia* spp.

Goldenrods | *Solidago* spp.



Bird seed plants

Tickseed | *Coreopsis* spp.

Coneflowers | *Echinacea*, *Ratibida*, *Rudbeckia* spp.

Sunflowers | *Helianthus* spp.

Beardtongues | *Penstemon* spp.

Goldenrod | *Solidago* spp.

Vervains | *Verbena hastata* and *V. stricta*



Bird berries plants

Redosier dogwood | *Cornus sericea*

Chokecherry | *Prunus virginiana*

Sumacs | *Rhus* spp.

Currants | *Ribes* spp.

Elderberry | *Sambucus racemosa*

Snowberries | *Symphoricarpos* spp.



Hummingbird nectar plants

Hummingbird mint | *Agastache* spp.

Hummingbird trumpet | *Epilobium canum* subsp. *garrettii*

Bridge's penstemon | *Penstemon rostriflorus*

Golden and wax currant | *Ribes aureum*, *R. cereum*

Sages | *Salvia* spp.

Red-birds-in-a-tree | *Scrophularia macrantha*

Shelter species

Serviceberry | *Amelanchier alnifolia*

Mountain mahoganies | *Cercocarpus* spp.

Rubber rabbitbrush | *Ericameria nauseosa*

Canyon plume | *Fallugia paradoxa*

Rocky Mountain juniper | *Juniperus scopulorum*

Switchgrass | *Panicum virgatum*

Little bluestem | *Schizachyrium scoparium*





FALL INTO MULCHING:

Prepping Your Garden for the Season Ahead

As the cold starts to set in, it is time to switch gears to projects that can be done in the chilling air of fall into winter. Mulching is a great choice. Not only is it highly beneficial, it is easier to accomplish without plants growing in the way!

So, what is mulch and what benefits does it provide? Mulch is a covering over the soil surface that helps shield plants and soil from the elements, can be made of a few different materials and provides aesthetic value to the garden.

Mulches function by creating a layer of material and air that help dissipate heat, water and air movement. The layer of mulch should sit on top of the soil and be about 3-4 inches thick for organic and 1-2 inches thick for inorganic to be effective; think of it like leaving a blanket for your plants to soften the effects of the elements. While all mulches offer benefits such as weed suppression, moisture retention, temperature regulation and erosion control, there are important differences between the two main types: organic and inorganic. Generally, organic mulches are best suited for shaded or high-water use gardens, while inorganic mulches are more appropriate for xeric or sunny gardens.

Organic mulches are defined by coming from, at one point, a living source. This can include pine needles, bark, wood chips, leaves and other yard waste. Most barks and wood chips are processed first to be suitable to mulch with, while using leaves, pine needles or other plants, such as cover crops, can be recycled from sources in your own yard.



Organic Mulch

Yard waste or cover crops are typically used for returning a greater amount of nutrients to the soil, while barks and chips do the same to a lesser extent. Regardless of the organic mulch used, the objective is to leave the decomposers in the soil with plenty of food so those nutrients within the mulch can be returned to the ground to promote plant growth. It should be noted that organic mulches can promote fungus and mold if not mixed every now and again. The stagnant, moist air feeds those invaders, so turning over and agitating the mulch every month helps to stop the spread.

Inorganic mulches include rocks, gravel and some plastic based products. I would suggest only using plastic products for pathways. These products are more harmful than beneficial, leaving microplastics behind as they deteriorate. Rocks, on the other hand, are a natural part of the landscape. Rocks that are typically $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter work best as mulching material. While these options lack the nutrient recycling of organic mulches, they excel at mitigating heat and water. Rocks are essentially batteries that charge up with heat over the course of the day, keeping the soil cooler in the process. Then at night, this stored energy is released back into the garden. This can help plants grow by keeping the roots warmer.



Inorganic Mulch

When selecting mulch, there are several factors to consider, including both cultural and aesthetic preferences. As stated above, the composition of your garden should influence what you use. Organic mulches are great for areas where slight soil amendment will be beneficial, such as annual flower displays, food production beds or for naturalized areas. Organic mulches should be replaced yearly to help plants prepare for the days to get longer and hotter, and should be agitated and mixed every few months to avoid anaerobic conditions. Contrarily, inorganic mulches are great for xeric spaces or areas that do not need extra nutrients. These mulches do not need to be replaced as often but can get mixed into the soil if agitated or compressed. There are many colors and textures to choose from, and style has little impact on effectiveness. My personal preference is to use locally sourced material to help the landscape reflect the natural spaces surrounding Fort Collins.

Mulch is placed in self-load bins at the locations listed below each week. Specific times and/or days of the week are not scheduled. If the bins are empty, residents can check again on another day. Community members may take as much mulch as they need; not for commercial businesses.

Year-Round Self-Loading Free Mulch

Mulch is replenished on a regular basis, but supply is limited and not guaranteed at all times.

Timberline Recycling Center 1903 S. Timberline Rd.

The Gardens on Spring Creek 2145 Centre Ave.

Hoffman Mill 1380 Hoffman Mill Rd.

CSU extension has more resources to dig deeper on the topic if so desired.
extension.colostate.edu/resource/mulching



Organic Mulch

**ANNUAL FLOWER DISPLAYS,
FOOD PRODUCTION BEDS, NATURALIZED AREAS**



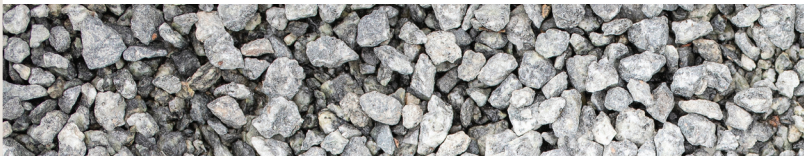
3-4" DEEP, REPLACED YEARLY



*By Vivian Beckman,
Horticulture Technician*

Inorganic Mulch

**XERIC SPACES,
AREAS THAT DON'T NEED AMMENDMENT**



1-2" DEEP, NOT REPLACED YEARLY



ARTS & CULTURE

Upcoming Events

The City of Fort Collins is home to several wonderful arts and cultural organizations offering exciting events and programs open to everyone.

Center for Creativity

Oct. 14–25 | Studio Tour Preview Exhibition: *Get ready for the annual Studio Tour & Sale by visiting this Preview Exhibition featuring one artwork from each participating studio. Opening Reception: Friday, Oct. 16, 6–8 p.m.*

Fort Collins Museum of Discovery

Oct. 18 | 11 a.m.–4 p.m. | Teen Self-Care Fair: *In partnership with Alliance for Suicide Prevention of Larimer County, this event is open to all youth who want to explore new ways to practice self-care. Whether you're into medieval longswords, art, aerial silks, yoga, meditation, working out or creating your own superhero, you're welcome to this free day at the museum.*

The Lincoln Center Events

This list is far from exhaustive; please visit [LCTix.com](https://lctix.com) for a list of all 2026/2027 performances.

Oct. 4 | Ghostbusters in Concert

A live concert experience of the beloved classic film with a live orchestra!

Oct. 7 | National Geographic LIVE: Chasing Monarchs

Fifty years after the startling discovery that monarch butterflies spend winters in the forests of Mexico, photographer and National Geographic Explorer Jaime Rojo reveals this winged wonder of the insect world in new ways with never-before-seen visuals.

Oct. 16–18 | Mystic Pizza

Based on the beloved 1988 MGM rom-com that launched the career of Julia Roberts, MYSTIC PIZZA is a new musical about three working-class girls who navigate the complexities of life, love and family in a small-town pizza joint.

Oct. 20 | Complexions Contemporary Ballet: Love Rocks

Experience LOVE ROCKS – set to the electric, guitar-driven anthems of Grammy legend Lenny Kravitz. Feel the energy in a vibrant celebration of love, diversity, and everything that makes us human.

The Lincoln Center Art Gallery

Sept. 11–Nov. 20 | Beyond the Box: Celebrating 20 years of the Transformer Cabinet Mural Project.

Join us for a reception celebrating the exhibit on Sept. 26 from 5:30–7 p.m. and the Beyond the Box: Artist Panel Discussion on Nov. 14 from 6–7 p.m.

Visual Arts

Oct. 24 & 25 | Fort Collins Artist Studio Tour and Sale: *Take a free self-guided tour of local artist studios revealing the mysteries of the creative process in and around Fort Collins.*

A New Sound for Accessibility

ACROSS FORT COLLINS ARTS & CULTURE FACILITIES

Every summer, thousands of people settle onto the Great Lawn at The Gardens on Spring Creek to hear live music drift across twelve acres of curated gardens. But for community members with hearing loss, this experience hasn't always come through clearly. Thanks to a generous gift from Audiology Group of Northern Colorado, that is changing — not just at The Gardens, but across several of the City of Fort Collins Arts & Culture facilities.

The initiative began with a conversation about The Lincoln Center. In keeping with City Council priorities around accessibility, staff there have been exploring ways to better serve patrons who use hearing aids or other assistive devices. Around the same time, Dr. Dan Ostergren of Audiology Group of Northern Colorado reached out to ask whether his practice could help support audio accessibility through a donation — specifically, toward a new technology called Auracast.

“Audiology Group of Northern Colorado is proud to partner with the City of Fort Collins to provide current, state-of-the-art assistive technology for our community members who wear Auracast compatible hearing devices,” Ostergren said. Legacy “loop” systems, he noted, are “being rapidly supplanted by Auracast broadcast systems,” which send “a consistent, high-quality signal directly to Auracast accessible hearing devices to improve auditory access to music, theater, public meetings, etc.” For Ostergren, the motivation was straightforward: “We believe a healthy community requires engagement from everyone, regardless of their challenges, and providing Auracast technology maximizes that access.”

How It Works

An Auracast transmitter draws an audio feed directly from the sound board and broadcasts it to any Bluetooth Auracast receiver — including compatible hearing aids, earbuds, and headphones. At The Lincoln Center, the technology will supplement, not replace, existing accessibility tools: the venue's T-coil system and loop headsets will remain in place alongside the new Auracast option, giving patrons three ways to tune in.

The donation's reach extends beyond The Lincoln Center. It also funded Auracast equipment for The Gardens on Spring Creek and the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery's OtterBox Digital Dome Theater, along with a remote unit that can travel to shows, programs and events across the city.

Interest in the project is already spreading. The video production team at Fort Collins Television (FCTV) contacted the Arts & Culture team to learn more about the rollout and how Auracast, paired with existing hearing loop and T-coil systems, might shape future accessibility upgrades in Council Chambers.

For Gardens members, the new feature may be as simple as pairing their personal hearing device at next summer's Live at The Gardens Concert Series — and hearing every note clearly. Please inquire with a house manager or usher at the next performance you attend for assistance.

To learn more about ways you can make an impact at The Gardens, please contact Elizabeth Messerli, emesserli@fortcollins.gov or call 970-416-2697.



Nutrien Invests \$25,000 to Grow The Gardens' Next Generation of Green Industry Leaders

The Gardens on Spring Creek received a \$25,000 gift from Nutrien to support a pipeline of youth programs that carries participants from their first taste of horticulture as middle schoolers to paid, career-launching internships as college students. Nutrien is a Saskatoon, Canada-based crop nutrient company and the world's largest producer of potash, with a corporate office in Loveland that has long supported our Northern Colorado communities.

The generous gift supports horticulture learning and education opportunities. It builds on a strong relationship between The Gardens and Nutrien — and its predecessor, Agrium — spanning more than a decade and now totaling nearly \$250,000 in cumulative support, including a \$100,000 gift toward the Nutrien Outdoor Teaching Kitchen in 2022.

This educational pipeline links four Gardens programs, each building on the last:

- *Junior Hort Summer Camp* welcomes rising sixth through eighth graders for a week of half-day sessions each July, introducing middle schoolers to horticulture and environmental stewardship while preparing them for volunteer work across Fort Collins.

- *School's Out! Volunteer Days* opens the door to sixth through twelfth graders on school holidays throughout the year, with themed sessions—from seasonal cleanup to Plant Sale and Garden of Lights preparation—that let teens fulfill service hours while meeting other young volunteers.

- Teens ready for a deeper commitment can join *Project Hort*, a full-summer program for seventh through twelfth graders who volunteer eight to twelve hours a week gardening, teaching and greeting guests, while also taking part in weekly stewardship and philanthropy lessons as well as professional-development activities.

- Finally, a *paid internship program* gives college students, many fulfilling degree requirements at Colorado State University and Front Range Community College, hands-on horticultural experience, mentorship and the financial support needed to pursue green-industry careers.

Together, the four programs are expected to reach about 100 young people this year, many of whom progress through the full pipeline — from camper to volunteer to intern, and in some cases to Gardens staff. For students as young as eleven, the programs open an early door into community service and career exploration at an age when most local volunteer opportunities are closed to them. For college students, internship stipends remove a financial barrier that too often keeps horticulture careers out of reach for those who cannot afford unpaid work.

The Gardens is grateful to Nutrien for its continued investment in Northern Colorado's young people and the future of the horticulture industry.

Thank you to



Nutrien

A YEAR OF MEMBER INSIDER EVENTS: *Looking Back at 2026*

What a year it's been for Member Insider Events!

This members-only series brought our community closer to the people and plants that make The Gardens on Spring Creek so special — and judging by the turnout, you loved it as much as we did.

We kicked things off in May with a Spring Plant Sale Sneak Peek, giving members first dibs on insight into this year's offerings. In June, our Butterfly House Behind-the-Scenes evening sold out weeks in advance, as members joined Butterfly Coordinators Brionna McCumber and Dani Bockman for a rare after-hours look at how our butterflies arrive, are cared for, and are released into the Butterfly House.

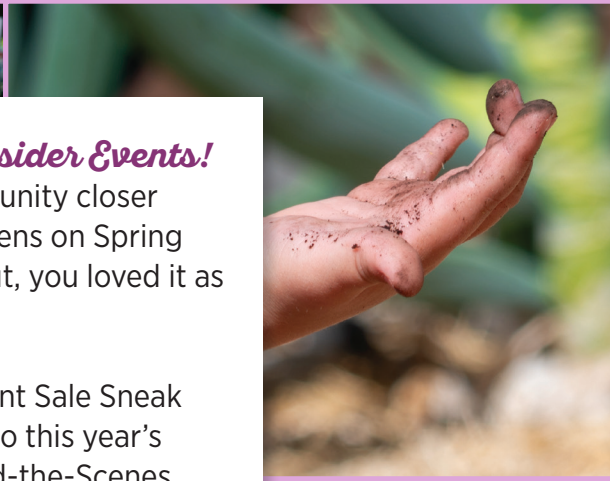
July brought a series first: our inaugural family-focused Insider Event! Members of all ages spent a morning releasing ladybugs, following a self-guided storytime trail through the Children's Garden, building fruit kabobs and hiking the Foothills Garden together — dirt under fingernails included.

August turned practical with Drought-Tolerant Landscaping tips from our partner at Fort Collins Utilities, and we closed out the season in September with an Evening Tour exploring what was blooming as summer faded into fall.

Each gathering featured elevated refreshments from Fiona's Deli, expert conversation, and genuine connection—and these events are becoming so popular they're now selling out well before the date arrives.

Thank you for making 2026 unforgettable. Do you have ideas for what you'd like to see next summer? Drop us line and let us know: GardensMembership@fortcollins.gov.

Keep an eye on your inbox and your Spring 2027 "Dig In" for next year's Member Insider Events lineup!



CONTACT US

Phone: 970-416-2486

Email: Gardens@fortcollins.govWeb: FortCollins.gov/Gardens**THE GARDENS
WILL GLOW AGAIN
THIS DECEMBER**

Every December, The Gardens on Spring Creek trades autumn colors for a half-mile trail of twinkling lights — grapevines strung with color, flowerbeds lit from within,

and larger-than-life blossoms that seem to dance after dark. Garden of Lights is returning, and as a member, you get to enjoy it with a discount on tickets.

Last year, we introduced the interactive Gumdrops Garden and it quickly became a visitor favorite. “My three-year-old daughter LOVED the new gumdrop feature,” one guest told us in last year’s survey. We’re bringing it back this year, along with the enchanting ice forest, so get those cameras ready.

You’ll also find the usual holiday staples: nightly visits with Santa,

live music, and food trucks serving seasonal treats. On select nights, keep an eye out for the elegant Ice Queen, and don’t miss the Sugar Plum Furries — Fort Collins’ beloved tutu-clad dog troupe.

Garden of Lights runs Dec. 11–23 and 26–27. Tickets will go on sale in early November.

FortCollins.gov/GardensLights

**GOURD-GEIOUS OCTOBER
NIGHTS AT THE GARDENS**

Dusk settles over The Gardens, and the pathways begin to glow. A carved skeleton grins from a mound of pumpkin rind. A coven of witches emerge from the Outdoor Kitchen. A medieval knight watches from a perch above the Great Lawn, eyes lit from within. In the Children’s Garden, a DJ is spinning “Monster Mash” and kids in costume dash toward the sound.

This is Pumpkins on Parade — The Gardens on Spring Creek’s beloved fall tradition, returning Oct. 22–25, from 5–9 p.m. nightly. Every year, local artists transform pumpkins into larger-than-life sculptures scattered across whimsical themes, turning an ordinary evening garden stroll into something magically immersive, a little bit spooky and completely memorable.

Wander the trails at your own pace. Snap photos beside an eerie dragon’s nest or while tangled in the spiderweb bridge tunnel. Let the littles show off their skills with pumpkin bowling while the grown-ups linger with libations listening to local live music under twinkling strings of lights. In advance of the event, visit the Gardens’ website to learn how to participate in the carved pumpkin contest with a drop off deadline of Oct. 21.

Whether you come for the pumpkins, the live entertainment, or the crisp autumn-air stroll, this is the kind of evening that becomes a cherished tradition of its own. Bundle up, bring the whole crew — the pumpkins are waiting.

FortCollins.gov/GardensPumpkins



PUMPKINS ON
PARADE