

# Pathways to peace

By Text By Kim Palmer, Star Tribune

September 25, 2007

Maybe walking in circles isn't so pointless after all. The labyrinth -- a circuitous path that winds toward a center and back out again -- has been used for millenniums as a meditative tool. Now modern medicine is discovering that there's a method to the meandering. Unlike a maze, which requires the user to plot an exit strategy, walking a labyrinth is a calming, right-brain activity. "It's intuitive and creative," said Lisa Gidlow Moriarty, a labyrinth designer and vice president of the international Labyrinth Society. It also helps to reduce anxiety, blood pressure, chronic pain and insomnia, according to research at the Harvard Medical School's Mind/Body Institute. Many health care facilities are installing labyrinths on their grounds, and the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is hosting an Oct. 4 lecture series on their healing benefits.

"But labyrinths aren't just for hospitals and churches," said Jean Larson, coordinator for the Arboretum's Center for Therapeutic Horticulture. "Labyrinths are for all of us."

The winding walkways are finding their way into more residential landscapes, including Moriarty's 5-acre property in Stillwater, where she has created 13, ranging from a 100-foot "Aerobic" design to a tiny "finger labyrinth" set in an old birdbath. "I try to walk one each day; it depends which one is calling to me," she said.

Moriarty has loved mazes and labyrinths since she was a child, but she developed a deeper appreciation for them after attending a workshop in the '90s. "My artist's eye first saw a beautiful design," she said. "Then, as I watched people responding to it, I sensed a

spiritual depth, like when you walk into a church and people are really engaged in prayer. You can feel that divine connection."

Labyrinths are a calming antidote to her day job as a county paralegal working on cases involving repeat sex offenders. "I really appreciate the peacefulness," she said. "It's a good day when you can build a labyrinth. It makes my heart sing."

Text By Kim Palmer • [kpalmer@startribune.com](mailto:kpalmer@startribune.com) Photos by Joel [Koyama](#)

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