

No need to hurry. Walking a labyrinth such as this one at Cedar Hill Enrichment Center is more a journey of the mind. **BELOW:** In search of enlightenment? Walk this way.



# Thoughtful Walks

Long used as meditative tools, labyrinths attract those who need to ponder deep thoughts or clear their minds. Here's how they work. By **Joe Rada**

**W**alk. Turn. Walk. Turn. Stop. Think. Walk. Turn. Watching someone walk a labyrinth might seem odd to the uninitiated. Is that person lost? Confused? Searching for something? With a little background, the rewards of threading the circular path begin to emerge. And yes, being lost, confused, or in search, in the higher sense of the terms, comes into play.

"Walking a labyrinth can be a metaphor for life," says Kat Stratton, fresh from a journey through a greenspace as well as the recesses of her own mind in the labyrinth at Cedar Hill Enrichment Center near Gainesville. "Just when you think you're reaching there—wherever 'there' is for you in life—you turn and realize you're only halfway there and still have far to go. It can be a very eye-opening experience."

**Setting a Course** Often marked by low stones, bricks, or grasses outside or by mosaic tiles inside, labyrinths present patterns

both simple and complex. They can guide one's immediate steps, placing one foot in front of the other, and also help direct long-range plans, taking a more philosophical or spiritual route.

Around for thousands of years in various forms, the ancient tools for contemplation, mind-clearing, centering, or praying cross religious and cultural lines. Today they turn up at country inns, nature centers, rural retreats, private gardens, hospitals, schools, and churches.

**Step Right In** "People come from all over to walk our labyrinth," says Kat. "Maybe they're searching for answers, thinking things through, facing personal issues, getting out anger over some situation, dealing with stress or sadness, or healing from a rift in a relationship."

"Everyone's walk is as unique as the person walking," she explains. "Some come alone. Others bring friends. I've seen couples hand in hand and busloads of people walking in single



file. Some stay quiet. Others sing. Some carry lit candles. I like to walk the labyrinth at night under a full moon, during winter and summer solstices, and during spring and fall equinoxes. I find that it is a good way to reconnect with the Earth's natural rhythms."

The 60-foot-diameter labyrinth at Cedar Hill, a spiritual- and ecological-based retreat founded in 1995 by two Adrian Dominican nuns, consists of stones placed in seven concentric circles under two sturdy oaks. "All the stones were donated, many from places with special significance to the donors, such as their homes, favorite woods, or other states," Kat says. "I brought some back from outings with the Georgia Native Plant Society, rescuing plants from construction sites."

**Not a Maze** Don't confuse a labyrinth with a maze. "Mazes are designed to confuse, even if just for fun," says Cedar Hill cofounder June Racicot. "Labyrinths have the opposite goal—to bring clarity to thinking, to help people see a way forward."

June, center cofounder Kathryn Cliatt, and executive director Kat designed this labyrinth and led volunteers to build it. "There's just one path in, circling to the center, where there's a bench to sit on before following the exact same path back out," June says.

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KAT STRATTON



Those who frequent this oak-shaded labyrinth often leave with a sunnier disposition.

"It's more of a personal journey, not a test or challenge. There's no right or wrong way to do this. Children sometimes walk on top of the rows of stones instead of in between them or jump from side to side, making a game of it. That's perfectly fine—any way they choose is okay."

**Seeing the Way** Pat Cail of Snellville walks the Cedar Hill labyrinth every Tuesday. Sometimes she brings along daughter Sarah and toddler granddaughter Cailee. "I pick a subject to think about and start right in," Pat says. "It's a very special experience. It grounds me.

Carrying little Cailee makes it even better. I can feel her calm down as I walk, and that calms me even more."

"People today are searching, but we don't always know what we're searching for," Kat says. "Our lives are so busy, flying down the highway, talking on cell phones, always in a rush. To focus on the grass, the rocks, the walk, and the silence is very relaxing. Taking time to really think gives us a better sense of what life is all about." ●

The labyrinth at **Cedar Hill Enrichment Center** sits an hour north of Atlanta at 5735 Dawsonville Highway, Gainesville, GA 30506 (4 miles east of State 400 on State 53); [www.cedarhillenrichment.org](http://www.cedarhillenrichment.org) or (770) 887-0051.

## Georgia's Labyrinths

Veriditas, a nonprofit society devoted to labyrinths, lists 31 in Georgia. They grace retreats, churches, inns, homes, and nature centers in Albany, Alpharetta, Athens, Atlanta, Augusta, Douglasville, Fayetteville, Kingsland, Macon, Richmond Hill, Savannah, Wildwood, and elsewhere. Visit [www.veriditas.org](http://www.veriditas.org), and click on "Worldwide Labyrinth Locator."