

VICTORIA EDUCATIONAL GARDENS A MULTI-DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

**Victoria County Master Gardeners, Cooperators (2000 - 2008)
Joe Janak, County Extension Agent - Ag/NR
Victoria County**

SUMMARY:

A nine year project to establish Victoria Educational Gardens (VEG) has proven successful with 37 demonstration gardens plus 13 other garden features all within one acre size. Over 700 youth plus several hundred adults toured the demonstration gardens in 2008 and annually. As a result, area residents learn sound ecological techniques, proper landscape management and can see from direct visual appraisal how recommended landscape plant varieties survive and/or flourish in the Victoria County environment. Plans and fundraising has begun to build the final phase, a 60' x 100' educational pavilion.

OBJECTIVES:

To demonstrate sound, environmental and economical horticultural practices and to provide a resource for the general public to see first hand how recommended plant varieties perform in the Victoria area so these techniques and varieties can be adapted in local private and commercial landscapes.

MATERIALS and METHODS:

In the spring of 2000, three master gardeners working on a small landscape project to beautify the old Foster Field Officer's Club at Victoria Regional Airport let their imaginations run wild and came up with the idea to create a complex of gardens in the open field that surrounded the club.

The wheels started turning, design plans were drawn up and by the end of the year the Victoria Regional Airport Commission granted permission for the Victoria County Master Gardeners Association to use the land surrounding the Officer's Club for an educational garden.

Thus, Victoria Educational Gardens (affectionately called VEG) was designed and divided into 6 phases - the first one being the children's garden, vegetable garden, storage shed and greenhouse – built all on the west side of the Officer's Club. Phases 2 through 5 include 16 mini-gardens, a large water garden and several demonstration areas on the property to the south and east of the Officer's Club. Phase 6 is planned to be a large pavilion with restrooms on an existing slab adjacent to the vegetable garden on the west side.

RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS:

Initial groundbreaking took place May 10, 2001 with about 50 active Victoria County Master Gardeners. After many months of fundraising, and with determination, enthusiasm, love of gardening and hard work, the first phase was completed and presented to the community on May 18, 2003. For the next two years, the Master Gardener took a break from hard labor and concentrated on spreading the word about the gardens and encouraging the community and schools to tour the educational facility.

With five more phases to complete, Master Gardeners conducted fundraising efforts by writing grants, sending out letters for community support, conducting plant sales twice a year, holding garden symposiums and co-sponsored annual garden tours. By 2005 enough funds were raised to continue garden plans for phase 2 – 5 on the east side of the Officer's Club which was started and completed in late 2006 and early 2007. (See Table 1 for a list of gardens) Pavers were sold at cost for the Military Honor Garden and as a fundraiser for the Path of Family and Friends.

After seven years in the making with the help of now 162 Master Gardeners and more than 11,600 volunteer hours (see Table 2 listing VEG chairs), the vision is now a reality with 37 demonstration gardens plus 13 other garden features bringing the investment in this educational project to over \$250,000. (See attached new 2008 VEG color brochure highlighting all features.)

VEG is open free to the public from dawn until dusk for individual viewing and is located at the Victoria Regional Airport at 333 Bachelor Drive. Victoria Educational Garden tours are conducted by VCMGA Members and Interns. Public tours can be arranged for groups by calling the Extension Office at 361-575-4581 or email: moni31@suddenlink.net or nancyk@vcmga.org.

By December 31, 2008, over \$80,000 has been raised and/or donated towards building the new \$200,000 Master Gardener Pavilion by the Master Gardeners. See Master Gardener Pavilion Donor list in Acknowledgements for list of personal and business donors (not including fundraisers).

Table 1. A list of 37 Educational Demonstration Gardens and 13 other Garden Features constructed at Victoria Educational Gardens (VEG), 333 Bachelor Dr., Victoria County Master Gardeners, Cooperators, Victoria County TX, (2000 - 2007).

Educational Demonstration Gardens

Entrance Garden	Annual / Seasonal Garden
Children's Garden	Ground Cover Demonstration
Concrete Pond	Pocket Herb Garden
Rainbow Circle	Shade Garden
Animal Alphabet Circle	Water Garden with waterfall, bog and land bridges
Sensory Area	Tropical Garden
Gravel water feature	Patio Container Garden
Native Area	Original Fountain
Birding Area	Daylily Garden
Birdhouse classroom	Weed Demonstration
Butterfly Area	
Secret Garden with butterfly house	
Vegetable Garden	
Compost Area	
Patriotic Garden	Other Garden Features
Heirloom Garden	Donor Wall
Earthkind™ Rose Trial	Gazebo (x2)
Meditation Garden	Greenhouse
Ornamental Grass Garden	Storage Shed
Large wind chimes	Rainwater Harvesting System
Antique Rose Garden	Cathedral Arbor
Xeriscape	Rose covered Arbor
Bubble Urn Fountain	Pergola
Iris Garden	Labyrinth
International Garden	Military Honor Garden
Perennial Garden	Path of Family and Friends
Turf Grass Demonstration	French Drain
	Dry Creek Bed

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Appreciation is expressed to Pat Plowman, Chairman of VEG, all Victoria County Master Gardener volunteers and their spouses and the following numerous donors to Victoria County Master Gardeners and Victoria County Extension making VEG possible:

Victoria Educational Garden Donors (2000 – 2007)

GOLDEN RAINTREE \$20,000 and more

Crossroads Foundation

TEXAS REDBUD \$10,000

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LIVE OAK \$5,000

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Table 2. Seven Main VEG Chairs, 29 Garden Areas and Sub-Chairs (for 37 Demonstration Gardens) at Victoria Educational Gardens (VEG), 333 Bachelor Dr., Victoria County Master Gardeners, Cooperators, Victoria County TX, (2000 - 2008).

(Each Sub-Chair has 3 – 13 Master Gardener volunteers assisting with the project.)

1. Fran Kanak
 - Butterfly - Barbara Bueth
 - Sensory - Maria Sobczak
 - Texas Native - Olivia Blanchard
 - Birding - Diana Maley

2. Ken Knief
 - Vegetable Garden - Gerald Bludau
 - Garden Entrance - Kim Green, Kathleen Musselman

3. Roy Cook
 - Greenhouse - Roy Cook
 - Airport Entrance - Cliff Knezek
 - Rainwater Harvesting - Glen Chilek
 - Compost - Susan Cohen

4. Nancy Zaplac
 - Patio Container - Martha Sawyers
 - Water Features - Pat Plowman
 - Tropical - Sandy Knief
 - Labyrinth/Meditation - Ann Parks Hedrick
 - Red/White/Blue - Mary Lauer

5. Pat Plowman
 - Shade - Gerrie Van Toledo
 - Terrace Herb/Groundcover - Mary Janak
 - Seasonal/Annuals - Barbara Schmidt
 - International - Kathy Chilek
 - Iris -
 - Antique Roses - Marie Graham
 - Ornamental Grasses -

6. Suzann Herricks
 - Xeriscape - Teresa Hulsey
 - Perennial -
 - Turf Grass - Charlie Neumeyer
 - EarthKind Roses - Jerome Janak
 - Day Lily - Doris Martinak
 - Patriotic - Nancy Kramer
 - Heirloom - Karen Renger

7. Ed Gregurek
 - Maintenance/Construction
 - Clean signs and kiosks
 - Train roses and vines
 - Mailboxes and maintain office - Carmen Price
 - Prune privets and yaupons - Virginia Richter
 - Where ever needed



View of children's garden on west side of Officers club.



View of gardens established in 2006 - 2007 on east side of Officers club.