

VICTORIA EDUCATIONAL GARDENS A MULTI-DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

**Victoria County Master Gardeners, Cooperators (2000 - 2009)
Joe Janak, County Extension Agent - Ag/NR
Victoria County**

SUMMARY:

A ten 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 1300 youth plus several hundred adults toured the demonstration gardens in 2009 and typically 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. Fundraising started in 2008 raised \$118,605.60 to build the final phase, a 60' x 100' educational pavilion. Coupled with funds on hand the new VEG Pavilion was nearly complete by the end of the year.

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 II through Phase V 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 VI funding for a 6000 square foot educational pavilion started in 2008 with major efforts in 2009 and construction started in October 2009.

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 early 2010 the Phase VI new VEG Pavilion was nearly complete. Over \$118,605 was raised and/or donated towards building the new Master Gardener Pavilion by the Master Gardeners plus other funds on hand were used for construction. 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 - 2009).

Educational Demonstration Gardens

- Entrance Garden
- Children's Garden
 - Concrete Pond
 - Rainbow Circle
 - Animal Alphabet Circle
 - Sensory Area
 - Gravel water feature
 - Native Area
 - Birding Area
 - Birdhouse classroom
 - Butterfly Area
 - Secret Garden with butterfly house
- Vegetable Garden
 - Compost Area
- Patriotic Garden
- Heirloom Garden
- Earthkind™ Rose Trial
- Meditation Garden
- Ornamental Grass Garden
 - Large wind chimes
- Antique Rose Garden
- Xeriscape
 - Bubble Urn Fountain
- Iris Garden
- International Garden
- Perennial Garden
- Turf Grass Demonstration
- Annual / Seasonal Garden

- Ground Cover Demonstration
- Pocket Herb Garden
- Shade Garden
- Water Garden with waterfall, bog and land bridges
- Tropical Garden
- Patio Container Garden
 - Original Fountain
- Daylily Garden
- Weed Demonstration

Other Garden Features

- Donor Wall
- Gazebo (x2)
- Greenhouse
- Storage Shed
- Rainwater Harvesting System
- Cathedral Arbor
- Rose covered Arbor
- Pergola
- Labyrinth
- Military Honor Garden
- Path of Family and Friends
- 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 RAIN TREE \$20,000 and more

Crossroads Foundation

TEXAS REDBUD \$10,000

Victoria County

Victoria Regional Airport

LIVE OAK \$5,000

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Master Gardener Pavilion Donors: (2009 – 2010)

LIVE OAK - \$5000 +

Borchers Leon, Charla - \$20,000
Dow Chemical Co. Foundation - \$10,000
Knezek, Cliff & Nora - \$15,000
Knezek, Cliff - \$15,000
Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.

SOUTHERN MAGNOLIA - \$2500

Crossroads Foundation - \$3,500
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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 - 2009).

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

1. Fran Kanak
Butterfly - Barbara Buethe
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



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

Labyrinth/Meditation - Ann Parks Hedrick
Red/White/Blue – Carmen Price

5. Pat Plowman

Shade - gerrie Van Toledo
Terrace Herb/Groundcover - Mary Janak
Seasonal/Annuals - Barbara Schmidt
International - kathy chilek
Iris - virginia Ruschhaupt
Antique Roses - Marie Graham
Ornamental Grasses -

6. Suzann Herricks

Xeriscape - Teresa Hulsey
Perennial - Pat Miller
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 gardens established in 2006 - 2007 on east side of Officers club.