

# A Day Trip to Mercer Botanic Gardens - 2024

For our outing to Mercer on October 16<sup>th</sup>, Donna had reserved a precinct bus and Barbara had arranged for a guided tour of the gardens. We gathered in the lobby of the Visitor Center where a docent gave us a brief history of Mercer Botanic Gardens. Thelma and Charles Mercer purchased the original 14.5 acres of land as their home and garden. Avid gardeners and nature lovers, they aimed to preserve native trees such as dogwoods, cabbage palmettos, species of viburnum and hawthorns. They introduced camellias and exotic tree species such as ginkgo, bauhinia, philadelphus and camphor.



Harris county purchased the property in 1974. Additional land purchases around the garden expanded the property to 180 acres as of today. In 2016 and 2017 severe floods submerged the area under 10-12 feet of water and caused great damage to structures, trees, plants and soil from which the grounds are still recovering. A statue of Thelma and her cat 'Jinx' is 'greeting' visitors at the entrance.

We were divided in 3 groups. The first group boarded a trolley for a guided tour through the extensive property while the rest of the ladies were free to explore the garden on their own.



The garden has several distinct sections. A particular sunny area is designated as a pollinator garden with many nectar plants in bloom. Meticulously manicured and planted in a traditional English style, is the formal garden.



The children's area features a large Fairy Garden and a 'plant zoo' with plants that have animal names such as toad stool mushroom and tiger lily.

The small groups on foot were looking to find the brick donated by the LF garden club to honor long time member, Barbara Wolz. These memorial bricks line the walkway and it did not take long before we discovered what we were looking for.

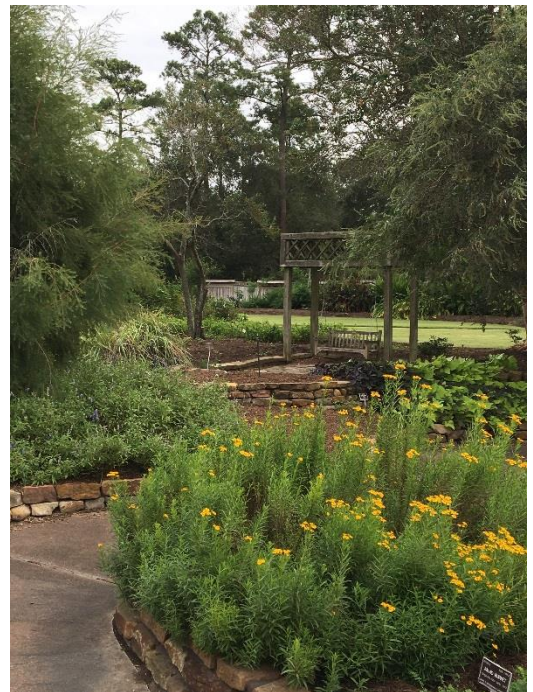


Strolling through the expanses, we encountered an herb and vegetable garden. Conservation of native and endangered species is an important mission of the Mercer society. These plants are carefully tended to by the volunteers to preserve them for generations to come.



The area featuring seasonal flowers, such as marigold asters, chard and cabbage, was in the planting stage and not blooming yet. Many workers spend countless hours first raising seasonal plants in the greenhouses and then establishing them in the prepared flower beds.

Seasonal changes make the park look different depending on the time of year one visits.



The trolley ride took us deep into the acreage of the botanical garden. Many of the trees along Cypress creek were washed away by the strong flood waters. The large bamboo forest was also devastated. Much work is done to replant it now.

Another improvement project is the creation of waterfalls reminiscent of natural falls along rivers in the hill country of Texas.



The story lake is a popular destination for visitors as it is a serene place and the home of many turtles. Even though Mercer Botanic gardens is surrounded by civilization, much wildlife, such as deer, bobcats, racoon and many birds may be seen on a walk on the nature trails around the park.

A new addition are several beehives that welcome these pollinators to the gardens.

Adjacent to Story lake is a field with a wide variety of antique and unusual lilies. Washed away by flood waters, some were recovered and are now planted in raised cubicles, separated from each other and tagged for future references. They will be beautiful in bloom.



We boarded the bus again for a short trip to the greenhouses located at the edge of the property.



Build close to a large retention pond that serves as a water source for the hothouses, each one has a specific purpose. In the first hothouse seedlings are sprouting and plants are being propagated. It has a controlled environment.

The next glasshouse, as well as open areas between the buildings, serves to harden the plants and ready them for the natural environment in which they will be planted.



All the work is done by many volunteers.

Some areas in the greenhouses are dedicated to the propagation of specific plant varieties such as ferns, orchids and begonias.

Mercer inherited a huge collection (200 pots) of cacti when the original owner moved to a nursing home. We spend much time admiring the large collection of the most unusual cactus varieties we had ever seen.

Many of the larger clay pots, in which the cacti grew, were hand painted by the wife of the donor.



It was difficult to leave this interesting place. But we got back on the bus which took us to Old Town Spring for a lunch at 'Lynn's table'.

