

Mississippi Gulf Coast Arboretum



Overview

The *Mississippi Gulf Coast Arboretum* is the means of celebrating, promoting, and conserving the iconic tree canopy that defines the region, is enjoyed by residents, and can be a valued draw for tourists from across the world. As defined, an arboretum is a site that supports a living collection of wood plants. The proposed *Mississippi Gulf Coast Arboretum* takes this basic concept and stretches it across the landscape of south Mississippi to highlight a collection of high-quality natural areas that are representative of the native coastal habitats for the region. The theme of this arboretum is native plant communities that, by definition, are naturally adapted to local conditions and thereby, resilient to impacts, especially from tropical storms and other natural disturbances.

Approach

Working with each of the Mississippi coast communities and community partners, the *Mississippi Urban Forest Council* proposes to develop a string of high-profile sites within each community, each of which will meet the requirements for both state and federal certification, and become demonstration sites for proper stewardship, restoration and resiliency. Many of these sites are already recognized as quality habitats, as part of existing trails, like the *Mississippi Coastal Birding Trail*, or systems of natural areas managed by government or non-profit organizations. This approach ensures commitment from municipalities that will support sustainability and the coast-wide approach toward tourism, embodied by Coastal Mississippi, the regional tourism destination management organization.

Benefits of the Project

- Provide workforce training to professionals and outreach to the public about best selections and care of native trees and shrubs.
- Urban forestry education for the public and students that will learn about the roles that trees play in healthy communities.
- Social benefits include: enhancing a place for people to gather, enjoy and use for exercise and other quality of life activities.
- Native trees and shrubs will provide food, shelter and habitat for wildlife.
- Native trees will enhance water quality within their respective watersheds.
- Sites along the trail can become destinations for nature tourists.

which will achieve heights of about 6-8 feet. Additional wet-tolerant herbaceous plants, including Joe-Pye Weed, Hibiscus, and Milkweed, will also be placed within this footprint along the edges. A narrow, 5-foot-wide band of dryer ground around the perimeter of the swale will be planted with a combination of perennial and annual native flowering plants that will serve as a “no-mow” zone. This area will be initially seeded with a range of spring, summer, and fall-flowering native species, including species of Salvia, milkweed, goldenrod, and other nectar and host plants. Once established, the tree and shrub portion of the site should require little, if no maintenance, beyond initial control for invasive grasses (the first year). The “no-mow” zone would require an annual “cutdown” during late winter to manage dead material.



Partners

In addition to the volunteers from the Renaissance Garden Foundation, other partner groups and volunteers include the Master Gardeners of Harrison County, airmen from Keeler Air Force Base, staff and veterans from the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, and teachers and students from local schools.

Outcomes, Products and Activities

As with all projects in this national effort, ongoing outreach and training will be made available, focused on:

- promoting the value of pollinators and beneficial insects;
- the use of a diversity of plant materials, especially low-maintenance native species, and;
- improve water quality flowing into Back Bay.

Products developed through this effort will include:

- a brief (6-8 page) “How-To” guide that describes the process and ways and means of establishing this type of garden;
- an educational sign that provides information about the value of the plants used at the site: e.g., a visual representation, with brief details, of the kinds of pollinators that utilize the key species that are present.

Activities will include:

- workdays during the establishment of the site, utilizing volunteers from partner organizations, and;
- short (1-2 hour) on-site workshops that provide first-hand learning experiences for a variety of audiences, including educators, community leaders, and the general public.

Garden Establishment Schedule

- Herbicide treatment of existing grass cover (late February)
- Planting of shrubs (early March)
- Planting of herbaceous plants (late March)
- Learning Activities (April-May and beyond)

Proposed Shrub Pollinator Garden at Hiller Park, Biloxi – Page 2 of 2