

## Rollingwood Waterwise Educational Garden

My name is Robert Patterson. I have lived at 3205 Pickwick for over 30 years. I have 25 years of experience with native Texas landscapes. I am a Texas Master Naturalist certified by Texas A&M university and I was the principal park commission member responsible for design and execution of the Rollingwood Waterwise Garden.

The garden was an idea conceived during one of the worst droughts in Texas history. At the time, the area in front of city hall was a wasteland of dead St Augustine grass and withering bushes. Realizing that drought, punctuated by periods of rain, is a way of life in Texas and that, with explosive growth in the region, the ratio of gallons of potable water per person was dropping daily, the park commission decided to take action. The system of Highland Lakes dams was completed around 1940 stabilizing our water supply at a maximum level which has not increased. The population of Austin in 1940 was about 89,000. The current population is around one million and grows daily. Like it or not, we are in a state of perpetual relative drought which gets worse daily.

The basic concept of The Garden was to: 1. Beautify the city hall landscape using a diversity of Southwestern native and adapted plants which would provide blooming and growing interest throughout the year, 2. conserve our precious potable water(including rainwater harvesting which would carry the landscape through the hottest and driest parts of the year), and 3. serve as an educational resource for Rollingwood citizens and others throughout the region interested in alternative ideas for their private landscapes.

Working with Scott Ogden, a nationally-recognized expert in Southwestern native and adapted plants, we worked out a design and budget and the project was approved by park commission and council. Shelly Bain, an alderwoman and park commission liaison, reached out to the citizens of Rollingwood. The enthusiastic response from citizens resulted in 50% of the funding for the garden coming from private donations. The Rollingwood Women's Club funded the water tanks to store the harvested rain water.

As the garden entered its first spring with a splash of greenery, color and diversity, it caught the attention of Pam Penick and Central Texas Gardner. The garden was featured on an episode of the show broadcast throughout the country. At that point, the garden became a nationally recognized example of a public-private partnership creating a beautiful, native landscape which conserved water and served as an educational resource. Over the years, as I've worked in the garden, I've talked with visiting ecotourists from as far away as New Mexico and North Carolina. On multiple occasions, I've spoken to professionals from Barton Springs Nursery and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center who come to study the diversity in the various climatic areas of the garden ranging from full shade to full sun. Since the garden was installed, xeriscaping has become the norm throughout the city of Rollingwood. Mission accomplished.

Sadly, The Rollingwood Waterwise Educational Garden has been severely degraded over the past several months. A wide swath of rounded, green, flowering native plants and have been removed leaving only vertical, architectural plants, mainly Sotols. A short list of plants removed includes: Dallas red lantana(a Texas perennial which blooms off and on all summer), Pride of Barbados(erect with bright orange blooms May-November), pale pavonia(an evergreen native shrub which blooms in cycles throughout the season), Limoncillo(a tiny, wispy desert plant

which blooms in explosions of small yellow flowers in cycles throughout the year), Lindheimer mulhy(a native Texas grass representative of the Texas tall grass prairie of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century). The most tragic example of degradation, and one from which recovery will be difficult, is the recent destruction of the Texas Palo Verde tree out near the street. A Palo Verde is an extremely hardy desert tree with beautiful dark green trunk and feathery green leaves which blooms profusely in yellow flowers in the spring. This specimen tree can live at least 100 years. The tree was leaning into the street as it was covered with ice. Instead of waiting for the ice to melt and, perhaps, at most, pruning injured branches, the tree was cut down.

This letter is not a complaint. It is not about aesthetics. This letter is about form and function, facets critical to the normal functioning of any system be it mechanical or natural. This letter is an introduction to the history of a Rollingwood icon and, most importantly, it is a plea for a more informed approach to caring for the garden. All gardens and landscapes evolve. Things change. However, in this case, that evolution should be guided by data and knowledge of the complex nature of the landscape with an eye toward maintaining the basic intent of the garden: beauty, diversity (which provides interest and seasonality), water conservation and education.

As previously mentioned, Texas A&M University offers at least two courses of interest: Texas Master Naturalist and Texas Master Gardener. Both are inexpensive and available in various regional chapters including Travis County. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center provides an unparalleled experience in native plants and landscapes of all varieties as well as opportunities to volunteer and work alongside professionals in the genre. I will personally buy several reference texts and donate them to the city as the start of a reference library, not just for the garden but for the park and city in general. I am retired and am

always available to consult if there are questions. If I don't know the answer, I will research the question until I find the answer. Data. Not opinion.

In closing, I respectfully request a more measured and knowledgeable approach to the iconic Rollingwood Waterwise Educational Garden. The citizens of Rollingwood deserve that respect and consideration.

Robert Patterson

3205 Pickwick Ln.