Getting to Know Sims Bayou

Commonly referred to as “The Bayou City,” Houston’s waterways make its geography lush and ecologically diverse. What better location for the Houston Botanic Garden than right on the banks of one of the city’s featured bayous? The Garden will be nestled in and around Sims Bayou, whose waters wind through the history of Texas, much as they wind through the City of Houston itself.

While Sims Bayou has always been home to herons, turtles, songbirds, and the occasional alligator, there was a time when camels grazed its banks. Francis R. Lubbock, Civil War Governor of Texas and the owner of a ranch on Sims Bayou, became the reluctant custodian of a herd of camels, an unfamiliar sight on a Texas ranch. According to his memoir, “Six Decades in Texas,” while a crowd of spectators gathered at Sims Bayou for the arrival of a steamship carrying the camels, a debate ensued as to whether camels could be lassoed. Settling on a wager of $10, Samuel Allen, a neighbor and fellow rancher, mounted his horse and proceeded to lasso a large camel on his first try. Lubbock eventually sold his land on Sims Bayou to that very same camel roper, Samuel Allen. Thousands of cattle then roamed the cattle king’s expansive Allen Ranch, which stretched from Houston to Galveston and included the area of the Houston Botanic Garden site.

Extensive efforts to enhance Sims Bayou began in the 1960’s and continue today. The planting of grass on its banks has resulted in less erosion and a more natural appearance than what is seen in many other Houston area bayous. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Harris County Flood Control District recently completed a 25-year, $395 million project called the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Risk Management Project to widen and deepen most of Sims, adding environmental enhancements, and modifying 22 bridges. Completion of this and other regional projects helps ensure that the Sims Bayou Watershed does not suffer the same flooding challenges that have plagued other areas around town. This project resulted in FEMA removing flood plain designation from 4,400 homes and businesses in the area surrounding the future site of the Garden.

The Houston Botanic Garden plans to celebrate its wonderful bayou and surrounding wetlands through the creation of gardens where visitors can experience firsthand the beauty of these habitats. In addition, the removal of debris and invasive vegetation will help in the restoration of Sims Bayou to a more natural state, showing the history and allure of The Bayou City’s environment.

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike.” – John Muir, The Yosemite (1912)
Letter from the Board Chair

Dear Friends,

Creating a botanic garden in Houston has given us the opportunity to work with extraordinary institutions around the globe with the common goal of collecting and showcasing plants for scientific and education purposes. As we move further down the road to opening the Houston Botanic Garden, we continue to experience this wonderful collaboration in the botanic garden community. It has been a joy to get to know so many wonderful people eager to help us bring our vision to life.

Recent visits to the San Antonio Botanical Garden, the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden, and Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens gave us insight into their successes, challenges, and many lessons learned. While visiting the San Antonio Botanical Garden, which plans to unveil an extensive expansion later this year, we discussed everything from their capital campaign to a new program that encourages healthy eating. In Dallas, we toured the children’s garden where emphasis on life and earth sciences are displayed alongside the various plant exhibits. We learned about the Dallas Arboretum’s extensive seasonal programming, including Pumpkin Village, which boasts more than 90,000 pumpkins. Mercer Arboretum is also growing and recently reopened Creekside Ramble, which was devastated by flooding last year. Mercer recently acquired 47,000 new plant specimens, significantly increasing their research possibilities. The connections we have made at these and other gardens across the world have provided a great opportunity for us to collaborate as we move forward with creating a world-class garden in Houston.

This truly is a great community who believes that supporting our success ultimately supports the goal of botanic gardens everywhere: to preserve biodiversity and inspire appreciation of plants and nature. What a wonderful environment for us to join as we Grow Houston’s Garden.

Nancy O’Connor Abendshein
Board Chair
Support Houston Botanic Garden

Schematic Design Concepts

Grow Houston’s Garden Campaign

To-Date: $15 million
Goal: $30 million
Make your gift online at hbg.org today.

Pledge your Plants

Houston Botanic Garden will need mature trees when construction begins. Interested in contributing a tree? Contact mariah@hbg.org.

Please mark your calendar for our 2017 Botanical Beginnings Luncheon and Extravaganza. At the luncheon, we will unveil the schematic design for our Botanic Beginnings phase of development that will open in 2020. We hope that you will be there to help make this event a grand success.

For questions please contact Mariah Lawhon at mariah@hbg.org or 713.715.9675.
Gift of a Garden

Susan Garver loved flowers. She always enjoyed having cut flowers in the house and delighted in creating beautiful arrangements rivaling the work of professionals. Like they are for many of us, gardens were a place of beauty and joy for Susan. She was also a committed and loving mother, and having children was one of the most important goals of her life. Susan’s commitment to her daughters and the children around her was evident in the countless hours she spent doing everything from driving the 12-passenger van for campouts and field trips to taking on important leadership roles as PTA President and Girl Scout Leader.

In early 2016, Mrs. Garver’s family asked her what she would like for her birthday. She had been ill, and said that she would like to be able to look out her window and see a garden. This was a birthday wish her family was eager to fulfill. Susan’s husband, Mike, spent the next few days carefully placing dog and pool toys in the yard and returning upstairs to see what his wife could see from her vantage point through the window. Sadly, about a week later, Susan Garver passed away and did not get to see her birthday garden.

Susan’s family continued to be dedicated to honoring her wish. After visiting the site on Sims Bayou and learning about the future Houston Botanic Garden, Mrs. Garver’s family decided to fulfill her birthday wish by committing to a $4 million gift through the Garver Foundation to the Houston Botanic Garden to help create a garden to be enjoyed by many generations of children. Susan’s love of the environment and her commitment to children will be remembered each time someone visits the future Susan Garver Children’s Discovery Garden. The Houston Botanic Garden is honored to be a part of Susan’s inspiring legacy and hopes that the Susan Garver Children’s Discovery Garden will inspire countless children to share Susan’s love of the beauty of nature.

Botanic Garden Leaders Lend Insight

On May 17, 2017, HBG hosted two leaders in the botanic garden world who shared their experience and knowledge regarding plant collections, gardens, and programs. The HBG Board and planning and design team gathered to explore and refine the Houston Botanic Garden’s horticulture priorities.

Casey Sclar, President of the American Public Gardens Association, shared his extensive knowledge of plant collections and provided insight into how Houston’s botanic garden can be unique but complimentary to the global network of botanic gardens. Maureen Heffernan shared her thoughts on how newly created gardens can simultaneously attract the public and build their collections. Having worked at the Cleveland Botanical Garden for nearly a decade, then serving as the Executive Director and successfully opening the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and the Myriad Botanical Garden, Maureen shared both cautionary tales and inspiring success stories.

The planning and design team left the workshop with greater understanding and focus on how to build and nurture Houston’s first botanic garden. The group explored ideas for unique programs that will attract both garden novices and experienced horticulturalists to the Houston Botanic Garden.
Additions to Our Team

HBG welcomes Mariah Lawhon to our growing team as our Development Manager. Mariah graduated with a BA from Rice University before going to work for her alma mater in the Alumni Relations office. In her short career, she has started a chapter of a nonprofit, launched a networking platform, and built many programs at Rice that will continue for years to come. Mariah’s passion for growing organizations and her enthusiasm make her a great addition to our staff.

Three summer interns are hard at work in the HBG offices providing administrative help and support on special projects. Trent Carruth, a recent Second Baptist School graduate, will enter his first year at Samford University in the fall. Veronica Rodriguez is a Hire Houston Youth intern studying environmental science at HCC. Marcus Manca is a rising sophomore at Rice University who came to us through the Owl Edge Internship program.

Homage to Oakleaf Hydrangea — Hydrangea quercifolia

How can one write enough about this divine Southeastern native shrub that provides year-long interest in the garden? Its genus is derived from “hydro” indicating water and “aggeion” indicating a vessel in reference to the cup-like capsular fruit that decorate its blooming cycles. The initial handsome feature which attracts us are the lobed leaves that resemble the red oak tree foliage—these large leaves provide special treats of color like burgundy, reds, and purples as the cooler seasons arrive. We admire its broad-rounded canopy spreading between 3'-6' wide that is supported by its richly colored multi-stemmed branches.

This deciduous shrub prefers well-draining soil. In some zones it is treated as an understory delight and in cooler climes it appreciates a bit more sun. Here in our Zone 9, the specimen may be more partial to morning sun and afternoon shade. The oakleaf hydrangea blooms at least twice a year, yet here in Houston some may bestow bloom cycles even more often. The stunning white blossoms are pyramidal in shape demonstrating lovely textures as these then begin to fade into the pinkish-brown hues. These florets are long-lived and are a popular dried flower choice. This upright plant demonstrates truly dramatic coloring as well when the bark’s exfoliation begins to bear rich colors of textured grays and browns. Sounds heavenly or celestial? Yes, it is.

Oakleaf hydrangea’s tough, cold-hardy, drought resistant nature further exemplifies its positive attributes along with being virtually disease and pest free in well-suited sites. As our friend, Charlotte Seidenberg, reminds us in her book, “The Wildlife Garden,” to pay respect to “a naturally beautiful selection that belongs in our country, to our state and to our own ecological region.” One appreciates its appealing refinement by the graceful growth habits and dazzling display of blooms throughout the year. Oakleaf hydrangea thrives in varying settings such as upon a shady bluff, nestled in moist groves, perched along stream beds or ravines. We plant these as handsome arching hedges or as an alluring specimen or, as my favorite, naturalizing in a woodland setting.

BotanIQ

- There are more trees on Earth than there are stars in our galaxy.
  - World Atlas

- In neighborhoods with more tree canopy cover, air quality improves by as much as 15 percent.

- Studies suggest that students with a view of trees outside their school window have higher test scores and a quicker recovery from stress than students who do not.

- For every 30 meters of trees, noise pollution is reduced by up to 50 percent.
  - American Forests

- During one year, a mature tree will absorb more than 48 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen in exchange.
  - European Environmental Agency

- An oak tree can house over 250 species of insects, as well as 300 species of lichen.
  - Forestry Commission

submitted by Susan Lummis
Short and simple.

Check out our new website and URL!