



L to R, Mercer's new Tropical Garden, left, and Shakespeare Garden

MERCER'S NEW GARDENS!

by Melody Hill

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On August 27, 2018, one year after Hurricane Harvey, Mercer Botanic Gardens opened the Tropical Garden. One year before, up to 12 feet of flood waters covered this garden, but now it resembles the lush Yucatan area. The main feature is a stonewall in the plaza that is the backdrop for an Olmec head fountain. Featuring banana trees, plumeria, anthuriums, Coppertone loquats, bougainvillea, tropical bromeliads, palms and more, this garden replicates the feeling of being in an ancient tropical jungle.

Happily, this was not the first new garden to open since Harvey, which covered every inch of Mercer's 300 acres in floodwaters. In fact, three other gardens have been completed since the devastating flood.

- First was the Shakespeare Garden in April, replacing an underutilized lawn area. Featured are flora mentioned in Shakespeare's literature, including antique roses, boxwoods, and seasonal color surrounding a seating area, fountain and a bust of William Shakespeare himself.

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- In May, with the help of the Native Plant Society of Texas and Monarch Watch grants, Mercer planted a new Pollinator Garden. While the physical design hasn't changed, over 130 different types of plants and 20 host plants are already attracting a wide variety of Texas pollinators. Ever-changing trials of additional pollinator-attracting varieties are being tested for shade-tolerance and ability to handle our often-erratic weather patterns (especially floods!)
 - Among the various habitat recommended plants in The Pollinator Garden (below left) are, center, lion's tail (*Leonotis leonurus*) and friendship sage (*Salvia x 'Amistad'*). Also (lower strip, l to r) cigar plant (*Cuphea ignea*), 'Pam's Pink' turk's cap (*Malvaviscus x 'Pam Puryear'*), firespike (*Odontonema strictum*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and blue mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)



- In June, Mercer opened the Children's Garden.
 - A larger-than-life succulent lizard, Lizzy, and Mondo grass Turtle, Turf, seem to be excite all ages.
 - A Plant Zoo highlights animal-named plants, such as elephant's foot jade, zebra aloe, and red bird plant and the under the sea garden mimics the ocean floor.

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- Sensory plants line the edges of the beds invite children to touch and smell, all while in the company of whimsical "garden people" made of terracotta pots. A wide variety of vegetables are also available for viewing.

Mercer Botanic Gardens not only restored many of the former gardens, additional new gardens have been put into place for the public to enjoy.

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HUMMERS ARE PASSING THROUGH! -- Judy Hill wants to know when hummingbirds migrate through Houston. We have hummers that stay year-round, but generally speaking the fall migration occurs August-September or later.

As a general rule, their fall stopovers last longer than spring visits, up to a month or more. For this reason, fall hummer-attracting plants are encouraged,



L to R, American basketflower, aquatic milkweed and flame acanthus

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TIME TO PLANT MOST BULBS! Fall is the ideal time for putting in bulbs and their cousins (tubers, corms & lookalikes such as daylilies). Most of these are so tough as a rule (aka ideal for lazy gardeners!) In the Spotlight Article below, Dodie Jackson takes us one step closer to a really low-care garden with even more suggestions.