

Tulsa Botanic Garden

by Stephanie George



AS OKLAHOMA'S second-largest city, Tulsa has everything a bustling metropolis can offer, from art to music and sports. But until the cusp of the 21st century, it lacked a major public garden. This began to change in 1999, when University of Oklahoma professor and student duo Barry Fugus and Pat Woodrum came up with the idea of creating a garden as a space in which the community could enjoy nature. Within a year they recruited nearly 800 members to a formative board, and soon after, this group raised more than \$10 million for initial development of what became the Tulsa Botanic Garden.

In 2004, a 170-acre plot of land surrounded by dense woodland was donated

to the project. Located approximately eight miles northwest of downtown Tulsa, the garden has developed into a serene place for urbanites and other visitors to enjoy its natural beauty and cultivated collections.

GETTING ESTABLISHED

Although the garden officially opened in 2009, it did not truly get on its feet until 2012, when a master plan for its development was implemented. "It's a relatively young institution, and people are still discovering it," notes Lori Hutson, communications and outreach director, who remembers the early days when there was no electricity or running water on the property, and all the plants had to be watered by hand.

The garden's first major installation was the **A.R. and Marylouise Tandy Floral Terraces**, built in 2015 and named in recognition of the locally-based foundation that funded it. Each of the four terraces is themed and packed with vibrant plantings. At the ground level is the **Lawn Terrace**, followed by the **Rose Terrace**, the **Perennial Terrace**, and the **Mediterranean Terrace**. These display over 8,000 permanent plants and several seasonal installations, such as plantings of 10,000 bulbs that creates a riot of spring color.

A six-foot-wide cascade of water runs through the terraces down a chader—a series of small stone steps—creating a shimmering effect. "It's a compelling de-

The vibrant spring bulb display at the A.R. and Marylouise Tandy Floral Terraces is one of the largest in the country.



A water source for the Stream Valley, the Spring Giant is also a seasonal planter that brings a fairytale-like feeling to the Children's Discovery Garden.

sign that's made completely from Oklahoma stone and takes inspiration from the Art Deco heritage in Tulsa," says Todd Lasseigne, president and CEO of the garden.

Just west of the Terraces is the **Cross Timbers Trail**. The cross timbers is an ecosystem particular to Oklahoma where the tallgrass prairies of the west converge with the deciduous forests of the east. This trail allows visitors to have an immersive experience in this unique habitat. There's also the **Lakeside Promenade**,

which encircles the seven-acre lake in the center of the gardens, winding through various collections with ever-changing palettes of color and texture.

Younger visitors, particularly, will enjoy the **Children's Discovery Garden**. Opened just last year, it is a colorful space for learning and exploration. The focal point of the garden is the **Stream Valley**. Its water source emanates from a 15-foot stone face sculpture, titled **Spring Giant**, that Hutson calls "truly one of a kind." The garden also includes

a sensory walk, a tree fort, and a rolling meadow, complete with trails that wind through grasses, flowering perennials, and larger-than-life insect whirligigs.

PART OF THE COMMUNITY

In addition to the diverse gardens already in place, several more are in the works, including a **Japanese Garden**, an **Indigenous Garden**, and an **Edibles and Natives Garden**. Regular community programs such as gardening talks, plant walks, and drop-in activities for families encourage visitor engagement with these spaces. Partnerships with several local universities and allied nonprofit organizations have made the gardens a valuable resource for research and conservation efforts, such as a recent study on lichens. And students of all ages often come to the gardens for class assignments, field trips, or just to experience nature.

In a relatively short span of time, the garden is well on its way to becoming the go-to green space for the community its founders envisioned it would. "It's been a robust past five years," Lasseigne says, "and I think we have a bright future." ☺

Stephanie George is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.

Additional Information

Tulsa Botanic Garden, 3900 Tulsa Botanic Drive, Tulsa, OK, 74127. (918) 289-0330. www.tulsabotanic.org.

- Hours: Year round from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday.
- Admission: Members free. General admissions for non-members (13+) \$8, Children (3–12) \$4, no charge for children under three.
- Tulsa Botanic Garden participates in the American Horticultural Society Reciprocal Admissions Program. AHS members showing a current AHS membership card receive free admission and discounts on educational programs or events.

Other nearby sites to explore in Tulsa:

Gilcrease Museum of American History & Art, www.gilcrease.org.

River Parks, www.riverparks.org.

Tulsa Zoo, www.tulsazoo.org.