

HCMGA Educational Rose Garden - by Monica Taylor

In 2012 a small group of recent Hamilton County Master Gardener Association (HCMGA) interns consisting of Elizabeth Boase, Joann Hamilton, and myself, Monica Taylor, decided we wanted to learn more about growing beautiful and healthy roses in Hamilton County. Our initial goal, after visiting several state rose gardens, and talking to various rose experts around the state (including experts at the Indianapolis Rose Society), was to educate ourselves and share our love of roses with other Hamilton County Master Gardeners (HCMGs) and the public.

The three of us discussed our ideas for a possible HCMGA educational rose garden with Bill Rice, our Purdue's Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Extension Educator. Bill suggested a potential site on the Hamilton County 4H Fairgrounds where we might get approval to plant this garden.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, Joann and I attempted to gather information about rose gardens in the Indianapolis and surrounding areas. Additionally, Joann and I, both members of the Indianapolis Rose Society, sought advice from that society's knowledgeable rose growers about setting up and planting a rose garden. We wanted to use all of the information we gathered to create and ensure we could deliver a beautiful, healthy rose garden to our members and the public.

With assistance from Bill Rice, and Mark Nolen (who was at that time, President of the Indianapolis Rose Society), the committee developed a list of requirements for an educational based rose garden to be located on the 4H Fairgrounds. These were the beginnings of the HCMGA Educational Rose Garden.

On October 2, 2012, Bill, Joann, and I presented a budget request to the HCMGA Board to fund the building of the HCMGA Educational Rose Garden. The Board enthusiastically supported our request and granted an initial \$15,000 toward building the garden. They also asked me to become the Chairman of the newly created HCMGA Rose Committee and I respectfully accepted.

On October 29, 2012, accompanied again by Joann and Bill, I presented our proposal for the rose garden, along with a request for use of the 4H land, to the Hamilton County Board. The project hit a snag during discussions about irrigation for the garden. The HCMGA Rose Garden request was tabled by the County Board pending further investigation, which included gathering quotes for the work necessary to get water lines which were to be accessible at the proposed rose garden's location.

Everything stopped and no further progress could be made in development of the garden during the next year while this point (water accessibility and irrigation) was debated. However, the team (Joann, Bill and I) along with leadership and various other members of the HCMGA began to work on developing potential alternate sites for the rose garden location in the event that the County Board decided not to allow the garden to be located on the 4H site.

Meanwhile, at the January 15, 2013 HCMGA membership meeting, Joann and I set up a booth at the HCMGA Volunteer Fair to try to get volunteers to help with the project once it was approved. We were overwhelmed with the positive response as thirty-seven Master Gardeners signed up to become the founding members of the HCMGA Rose Garden Committee. These volunteers were very excited to learn more about successfully growing roses and to begin work on the planned rose garden. It was a terrific start! But of course, the location for this rose garden was still up in the air.

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During 2013, I arranged for Mark Nolen, President of the Indianapolis Rose Society, to speak to the HCMGA membership at our February 19th monthly membership meeting. The title of his talk was “Growing Roses is Easy”. The HCMGA membership responded enthusiastically, expressing their desire to learn more about growing roses in their own and community gardens. More volunteers signed up for the newly created HCMGA Rose Committee. The project was definitely gathering steam and gaining even more support from our local Master Gardeners.

Later that same year, the county finally approved our use of the section of land in Noblesville in front of the 4H offices that we had originally requested in October of 2012. The HCMGA Board paid for (with help from the county) the water irrigation system.

Additionally, HCMGA funded (per our original design) white picket fencing around the garden, a rose arbor, three trellises and two concrete benches intended to welcome visitors to our garden. They covered all costs associated with the garden setup, including several tons of special rose soil for the raised rose beds, purchase of 103 roses, along with everything required for the roses’ upkeep, and mulch for the beds and flume for the garden’s walkway.

Unfortunately, the approval timing in 2013 made it too late to allow time for ordering and planting a garden full of roses for that season. However, within approximately one week of receiving the county’s approval, Joann and I had set up deliveries of the special rose soil as well as mulch to hold the beds in place through the upcoming winter.

Additionally, we quickly organized dates for our very happy and excited volunteer group to begin the initial setup of the garden including work on the raised rose beds (which we planned to plant the following Spring, 2014). It’s impossible to express exactly how much each volunteer contributed that Fall in terms of work. They put cardboard down in order to prevent weeds from springing up in the garden, and then wheel barrowed two truckloads of special rose planting soil into raised beds, as well as putting down a crushed stone pathway, and finally, mulching over the raised beds to protect them over the winter. It was truly a labor of love and a testament to our wonderful Master Gardeners! Our volunteers are truly the backbone of this garden!

That winter, Joann and I spent many hours picking just the right roses to go in each special rose bed. Of course, each rose had to be winter hardy and compatible with our Indiana growing zone. We wanted to include roses that the public might grow and want to learn more about since this garden was after all, an educational garden. Much thought was given as to how to best educate and present these roses to the public and our Master Gardener membership. Additionally, we wanted this garden to be a visually pleasing area that was an inviting and welcoming place for visitors to walk through, to sit in and just enjoy the roses and the garden.

In planning this HCMGA Educational Rose Garden and to supply optimal information to our visitors, each rose planted in the garden was given a large metal identification tag which provides a picture of the rose bloom, the rose name, as well as a short description of that rose’s potential plant size. Additionally, a Quick Response (QR) Code is available on each metal rose tag to link to more in-depth information provided on the HCMGA website. The information includes further details about the particular rose’s blooming cycles, fragrance, shade tolerance and other interesting facts.

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Russel Lopez, who contributed mightily to the actual building of the garden during the Fall, 2013 setup and beyond, became the newest member of our Rose Garden Committee leadership (replacing Elizabeth Boase, who had taken some time off from the rose garden to become a new mom). With his vast IT background, Russel quickly became our expert in setting up our QR codes and linking them to our rose tags and our website. (In fact, Russel is now one of the IT leaders for our HCMGA and a key resource in helping many of our public garden committees set up QR codes.)

What had begun in 2012, eventually culminated on April 26, 2014, with the planting by over sixty Master Gardener volunteers of 103 roses in our HCMGA Educational Rose Garden. Volunteers then finished up the day by mulching the entire garden. We appreciated all of our great volunteers and enjoyed having Mark Nolen (past President of the Indianapolis Rose Society) and his wife, Cathy, there that day, educating and coaching our HCMGA volunteers, many of whom had never planted a rose prior to our planting day. Mark and Cathy are now the unofficial godparents of our rose garden.

Volunteers now come every week during the growing season to ensure that our roses remain healthy and clean up the garden for our visitors. This past Fall they covered each rose shrub with a foot of mulch to protect them during their Winter's sleep. This rose garden wouldn't exist without our HCMGA volunteers.

While our garden does not have a complete representative of every type and cultivar of roses available, it was specifically designed to educate and show visitors some of the varieties of roses which can in fact grow well in our Indiana Plant Hardiness Zone 6. Some of our roses only bloom once a year (e.g. some of the Old Garden Roses (OGRs)), while others bloom continuously from May through November.

Within the HCMGA Educational Rose Garden there are rose beds containing: Floribunda, David Austin, Kordes, Buck, Earth Kind, Climbers, Old Garden, Miniflora, Miniature, Hybrid Tea, Drift and Knock Out roses. Each of the garden's original roses was picked for sustainability in our 6A USDA Hardiness Zone.

Currently, Joann Hamilton and I are the co-Chairs for the HCMGA Educational Rose Garden Committee. We encourage you to come and visit our rose garden and learn more about which roses grow well in Hamilton County and Indiana. The garden is located on the grounds of the 4H Fairgrounds on Pleasant Street in Noblesville, Indiana. Additionally, you can learn more about each of our roses on our HCMGA website at <http://hcmga.org/committees/display-beds-4-h-grounds/rose-garden/>

We hope you'll stop, sit down and take pleasure in the sights, sounds and scents provided by our roses. We've loved planting and taking care of this garden. We sincerely hope you enjoy it too!