A week ago, Osceola County master gardeners dedicated their new demonstration gardens. Designed and maintained by Master Gardener volunteers, the demonstration landscape and vegetable gardens are around the Extension Services building at Osceola Heritage Park.

More than a decade ago, the gardens were first implemented at the old Kissimmee Valley Agricultural Center. The purpose of the gardens was to demonstrate proper gardening practices for Central Florida homeowners. They served as an educational tool for Master Gardeners and the faculty of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Osceola County Extension office. Thousands of adults and children visited these gardens throughout their existence.

With the destruction of the old agricultural center, the original gardens were also demolished, but not without the dream of rebuilding. Design of the new landscape and vegetable gardens began immediately. Construction of the new gardens began in the fall of 2002. After months of planning and work, the gardens are ready, though they always will be a work in progress.

As visitors approach the front of the extension services building, the demonstration gardens are to the left. They consist of multiple small theme gardens that can all be easily replicated in the home landscape.

Master Gardeners and Extension Service officials stress the importance of picking the right plant for the given environmental conditions. This is especially true for roses. Hybrid roses can be difficult to grow in the Florida environment. In the demonstration garden, old garden roses are planted, which are nearly carefree plants.

Rose Garden

Behind the rose garden is the water garden. This garden illustrates how easy it is to construct a water garden in the home landscape. With a pond form, some decorative rocks and water plants, this is an easy-to-do weekend project.

Water Garden

The native plant garden continues along the left of the pathway and contains plants that thrive in Central Florida landscapes. Once established, they require little maintenance and are drought tolerant.

Native Plants

Across the pathway from the native plants is the tropical garden, featuring varieties of hybrid hibiscus plants and other-frost-sensitive tropicaals.

Tropical Plants

The corner of the demonstration landscape garden consists of a butterfly garden. Plants that attract both the adult and larvae (caterpillar) of the butterfly are grouped together to bring this beautiful wildlife into the gardens.

Butterfly Garden

Around the bend of the pathway is the ornamental grass garden. This garden is still in the development stage, but stop and listen while you are there. The sound of the wind blowing through the large grass blades is relaxing.

Ornamental Grass Garden
The pathway continues around the side of the building to a gazebo that was saved from the original garden. With more than 10 years of wear and tear, it was in need of a makeover. Now repaired and improved, it is inviting for rest breaks.

Gazebo

Beyond the gazebo and behind the extension services building is the demonstration vegetable garden. This garden shows how to work without breaking your back, using raised plant beds. The garden also demonstrates the use of micro-irrigation and soil solarization to reduce the threat of nematodes and diseases.

Vegetable Garden

Self-guided tours of the gardens are available. Stop by the Master Gardener plant clinic for a guide map. Guided tours of the gardens are available by appointment beginning in 2004. For details, call (321) 697-3000.

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