

HABITAT HERALD

Wildlife Austin's monthly Newsletter



VOL 1 . ISSUE 6

Wildlife Austin

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 3rd - Labor Day!
Enjoy your day off.

Sept 8th -
Swiftfest in Jonestown
www.facebook.com/SwiftFestInJonestown

Sept 23rd - the 18th
annual Lake Travis under-
water clean up with KAB!
www.keeptaustinbeautiful.org/underwater

Sept 23rd -
National Plug-In Day.
Come Celebrate Green
Energy!
events.pluginday.org/p/salsa/event/common/public/index.sjs?event_KEY=67964

Sept 29th - Wildlife Aus-
tin talk at North Village
Library (2pm)
library.austintexas.gov/event/keep-austin-wild

Sept 29th - 12th Annual
Renewable Energy
Roundup and Green En-
ergy Fair in Fredricks-
burg, TX:
www.austineconetwork.com/event/12th-annual-renewable-energy-roundup-green-living-

SEPTEMBER 2012



Greetings! In this issue we wanted to focus on the amazing Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program. We are featuring the Festival Beach Community Garden as our "Garden of the Month", and we have this short piece below about the history of the SUACG by Sarah Brownstein:

Austin Grows with the City's Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program

In 2009 the City of Austin adopted a resolution in support of sustainable urban agriculture, giving birth to the City's Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Garden Program (SUACG). Through this and subsequent policies, the City has prioritized programmatic resource allocation and development of innovative efforts to strengthen Austin's local food system.



In 2011, the SUACG identified city-owned sites that could be made available for sustainable food production and established an endorsement process for community gardens and urban agriculture projects. This streamlined the process for establishing community gardens and sustainable urban agriculture on city land, and provided projects on both public and private land with access to water tap waivers. In a short time, SUACG has supported the development or expansion of eleven community gardens and urban farms in Austin. Today the program continues to support a sustainable local food system in Austin by working to equitably provide opportunities for all populations, especially high-risk and low-income groups, to benefit from healthy, local foods. Within the last few months, and in partnership with the St. David's Foundation's Health's Angels, SUACG established a wheelchair accessible raised bed community garden for members of the City's aging population onsite at the South Austin Senior Activity Center.



SUACG is working with partners across the community to grow the local food system in Austin from within. A core component of the program's mission is to connect the dots in Austin's local food community. For that reason, SUACG has developed a monthly networking happy hour to see the synergy that results from bringing together

members of the entire local food system.

For more information or to get involved, visit the SUACG website at www.austintexas.gov/AustinGrows.

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Notes from Erin



In this issue of the Habitat Herald I really wanted to highlight the idea of combining food gardens with a wildlife habitat. Many of the certified wildlife habitats here in Austin also contain a food garden, and several of our community gardens are certified! Festival Beach is a wonderful example of this kind of synergy.

It can be immensely beneficial to have native plants surrounding typical cultivated plants. Your garden will attract more beneficial insects such as pollinators and pest predators. This is why many commercial farmers construct a wildlife habitat buffer next to crop fields. It's a well-known concept, and one that you can easily incorporate into your yard.

Focus on Austin Natives

What's growing in Lady Bird Lake? Ca-ca-bomba.

By Jessica Wilson

Cabomba, or fanwort, is the showy aquatic plant that's growing along both north and south shores of Lady Bird Lake between Barton Creek and the Lamar Bridge. It is a native and has delicate white flowers that often bloom underwater. While this plant can come to the surface, it does not form dense surface mats, and is considered a good addition to the lake's ecosystem. It has increased in the lake recently - as Barton Springs Pool vegetation is removed for swimmers, the plants are often put into Barton Creek below the pool, and in the past few years, the plant has established and spread in the lake itself. You may see woody debris (twigs, sticks, etc) caught up in the plants- this is also natural

and a good thing- as the wood decomposes, it actually helps use up excess nitrogen which can contribute to nuisance algae blooms. Aquatic plants provide the lake and creek with some important things- oxygen, food, hiding places and spawning areas for aquatic organisms (fish, turtles, insects, waterfowl) as well as trapping sediment to help keep the water clear.



Follow the Watershed Protection Department at www.facebook.com/AustinWatershed

Jessica Wilson is the Education Manager for the COA's Watershed Protection Department

Focus on Austin Invasives

Nutria in a Nutshell

By Lauren Rowe

While you are out enjoying your summer stroll around Lady Bird Lake you may notice a very large rodent. No, it's not a beaver with a deformed tail, it's actually a nutria! Nutria, otherwise known as coypu, are large rodents native to South America that were introduced to the United States in the 1930s. Nutria were originally introduced mainly in Louisiana during this time as an alternative fur and food source, but unfortunately the nutria business was not profitable. As a result of this introduction to a new landscape, the nutria began to reproduce at alarming rates, having as many as three litters a year and spreading throughout most of the southern United States. Nutria can reach up to 22 pounds and live up to ten years in age. Although they are omnivorous by nature, their main food sources are the aquatic plant life along the shoreline. The removal of this plant life allows more substrate to enter the waterway and more erosion to occur on the banks. They are generally very friendly in nature and enjoy sunning and grooming in public, however; as with all wild animals it is always best to observe them from afar. If you have a body of water on your personal property proper draining and weeding of the area will help discourage nutria from settling in the area. Nutria also like to eat away the top layer of tree bark, referred to as girdling, which can be prevented by wrapping trees, such as Bald Cypress, with burlap or other protective coverings. And as with many other invasive species control methods, encouraging native plants and animals in your landscape will always help combat any invasive species trying to encroach on the habitat. It is important to remember that although an animal may seem cute and endearing sometimes that animal is not a native of the landscape and thus disrupts the natural lifecycles that occur in that area.



Lauren Rowe is a Park Ranger with the City of Austin

Garden of the Month

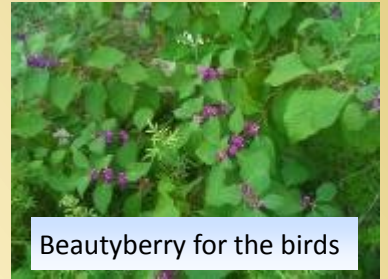
This month we feature the Festival Beach Community Garden! The volunteers of this garden do a great job of combining a resource garden with a certified wildlife habitat. They also utilized sustainable gardening practices such as composting, mulching, rainwater collection, and xeriscaping.



Welcome!



Proudly certified!



Beautyberry for the birds



Compost action!



Wildlife area complete with water element



Infiltration swales to deal with run-off



Grape vines camouflage the fence



Beautiful large pecan tree



Harvesting rainwater

Garden of the Month

The Festival Beach Community Garden is 2-acres of property at the corner of Waller and Clermont Streets in East Austin, divided into affordable garden plots and community spaces. Since opening in April 2010, the garden has grown to include more than 80 gardeners growing a variety of fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants. The site provides communal tools, irrigation and a space for educational and community events. The planning committees are volunteer-driven, made up of gardeners and community members.

The Festival Beach Community Garden strives to serve East Austin by:

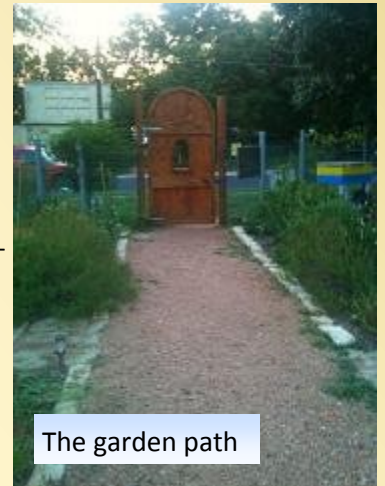
- Providing local gardeners with a reliable source of fresh, nutritious and affordable food.
- Creating a gathering space that brings together diverse neighbors to encourage cooperation, collaboration and friendship.
- Serving as a source of regular food donations to nearby food pantries.
- Providing a community space for free educational and enrichment activities on a variety of topics related to gardening, healthy living and our community.
- Creating a sustainable urban-nature ecosystem that provides a habitat for wildlife and transforms an underutilized space into a beautiful and useful community area.

The Festival Beach Community Garden is made possible through the efforts of the volunteer-based Festival Beach Community Garden Planning Group; sponsorship by the Sustainable Food Center, Austin Parks and Recreation Department, and Austin Parks Foundation; through plot rental fees paid by gardeners; and through generous donations from neighbors and local businesses.

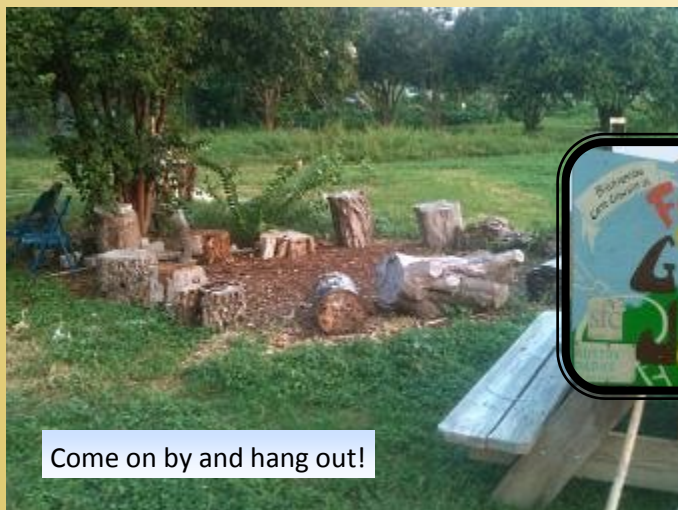
Workdays are a great time to stop by the garden and see what's growing. We meet on the second Saturday of every month from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. or so. Drop by to say hello or bring your work gloves and pitch in! For more information call (512) 508-8320.



A satisfied customer



The garden path



Come on by and hang out!



Gardening at its best



Schoolyard Habitat Update



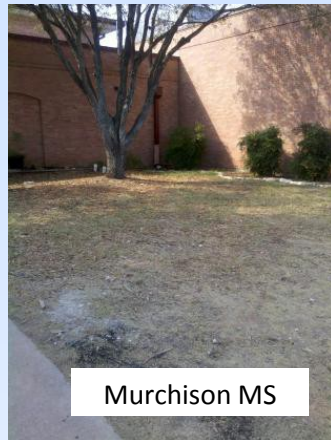
Back to School!

AISD schools have installed over 30 certified Schoolyard Habitats and teachers have hit the ground running for the 2012-2013 school year! Schoolyard habitats offer space for students to engage in the natural world around them and allow for interdisciplinary learning that is hands on and inexpensive. They provide increased resources and opportunities for creative instruction and act as a living laboratory for our campuses.

Can you match these before and after photos?



Garcia MS



Murchison MS



A



B



Paredes MS



C



Dawson MS



D



Schoolyard Habitat Success Depends on Volunteers Like You!

Contact Anne Muller AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist
amuller@austinisd.org or 841-5070

For an up to date list of work days and volunteer opportunities



Would YOU like to receive the the Wildlife Austin newsletter electronically?

Simply e-mail us at wildlife@austintexas.gov!



The Lake Travis Underwater Cleanup is the BIGGEST scuba diving and shoreline cleanup in Texas. The event invites several hundred certified scuba divers and shoreline volunteers to help round-up trash from the bottom of Lake Travis and 11 Travis County Parks around the lake. The cleanup is followed by a volunteer thank-you party & is a great event for ALL ages! RAIN OR SHINE!



Join Keep Austin Beautiful, Colorado River Foundation, and Travis County Parks and Natural Resources! Click the link to sign up and learn more!

www.keeptexasbeautiful.org/underwater

Tips for Living Green: Edible Native Plants

Everyone loves native plants. They are beautiful, great for wildlife, and in some cases even delicious! With this issue of the Habitat Herald devoted to the collaboration of food and wildlife gardening, I thought it would be great to explore some of the incredible edible native plants that you can add to your wildlife habitat:

Texas Persimmon - this wonderful native tree is nice to look at and also bears delicious fruit! Be sure to only eat them in the fall when they are black and almost overripe, and wear something you don't care about because they can get messy!



Agarita - You know that prickly plant you accidentally walked in to? That is our wonderful native Agarita. When the berries are ripe in late Spring you can eat them off the bush. Don't eat too many though because their acidic nature can give you a stomachache. The Agarita berry also makes great jelly which you still can find in certain stores.

Turks Cap - The entire plant is actually edible, but it's the fruit you want. In late summer you should start seeing plants with small fruit that apparently taste like apples. Hummingbirds also love the flowers, so everyone really wins!

Chile Pequin - Loved by birds, the chile's produced by this plant are hot! If you have a love for spicy than this is the plant for you!



There are lots more. Check out this list compiled by Mr. Smarty Plants from the Wildflower Center (www.wildflower.org/expert/show.php?id=4438) for more information. There is no reason why we can't share our garden spaces with wildlife, and judging by these native edible plants, we all have similar tastes.

“Like”

[Austin Parks and Recreation](#) on Facebook and look for the Wildlife Austin posts!



The City of Austin is proud to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities, please call (512) 974-6700.